SREE LALITOPAKHYANAM



By

SRI KRISHNANANDA NATHA

SREE LALITOPAKHYANAM

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Om Sree Guru Para Brahmane Namaha

OM SREEM *OM SREEM*

SREERASTHU *SUBHAMASTU* *AVIGHNAMASTHU*

SREE LALIT OPAKHYANAM

Being the STORY of DEVI LALITA MAHA-TRIPURA SUNDARI

Translated into English from Uttara - khanda of BRAHMANDA MAHA PURANA, last of the EIGHTEEN MAHA PURANAS extant.

BY

MALLEM. SREE VENUGOPAL RAO

OF

DHEEKSHA NAME

SREE KRISHNANANDANATHA

SRIVIDYA GURU

&

FOUNDER OF

SOHAM SRIVIDYA SADHANAYANA

THIS BOOK HAS BEEN

LOVINGLY DEDICATED TO THE

MEMORY OF

HIS BELOVED WIFE

SMT SUVASINI
MALLEM HEMAVATHY DEVI
OF
DEEKSHA NAME

SRI KRISHNADEVYAMBA

PREFACE

It has pleased Sree Devi Lalita Rajarajesvari to grant me this great opportunity to translate, into the English language, Her most glorious and soul-purifying Story: LALITOPAKHYANAM, from the Sanskrit version. It has been a very elevating experience, punctuated with many insights into the miraculous nature of the Hand of providence in my day to day life: proving thereby that the august Presence of Almighty Shakti was guiding me at every turn,making me, more or less, an instrument in Her Hands.

Although I had heard and read of Kali, Karali, Kamala, Bharati, Tara, Bhuvaneswari, Bhairavi, Bagala, Syamala, Varahi, Matangi, Dhumavathi, Cchinnamastha, Bhavani, Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswathi, Vama, Jyeshta, Raudri, Savitri, Gayatri, Sita and Radha and many other manifestations of the ONE SHAKTI and whatever else you may have heard of, I have somehow been always enchanted by MOTHER LALITA, above all; and I but strive to be Her loving son, knowing always that She is ever mindful -nay, lovingly attentive to my every need, including the welfare of every member of my family and kith and kin. Of course, I do not, for even a moment, disregard or cease to worship any of the various other gods and godesses of the Hindu Pantheon; but MOTHER LALITA has somehow captivated my SOUL and bound it to Herself; so that the very utterance of Her sacred NAME and MANTRA fills me with Her HOLY, ROSY, RADIANT and LOVING PRESENCE. No wonder, then, that I had been thus enabled to translate this SOUL-PURIFYING AND WONDERFUL STORY OF HER AVATHAR, for the benefit of HER English - knowing devotees.

Before I close this Preface, I wish to acknowledge the great help rendered to me by Brahmasri Neduneri Veerrajugaru in readily typing out the entire manuscript of Sree Lalitopakhyanam as a devoted labour of love, so as to get it ready for the Press. My thanks are also due to the innumerable admirers who patiently read through and enjoyed both the manuscript and typescript, and encouraged me to have it published; so as to bring it within reach of the English knowing public at large. May Divine Mother Lalita BLESS every one of them with Her BOUNTY. AMEN!

Mallem. Sree Venugopal Rao

of Deeksha - name

KRISHNANANDANATHA

FOREWORD

Sree Lalitopakhyanam is a sacred text which occupies the LAST PART OF THE LATEST OF THE EIGHTEEN MAJOR PURANAS Known as the BRAHMANDA MAHAPURANA.

Thus, CROWNING ALL TAANTRIC LITERATURE, this sacred and inspiring story of Divine Mother Lalita Rajarajeswari is a practical APPROACH to win the favour of the Holy Mother.

Although Sree LALITA is the Supreme Goddess, Her name itself signifies that She is easily approachable.

LALITA-VIDYA or SRIVIDYA, however, is highly occult; and is a great repository of many vital and potent mantras which can bestow all Siddhis. Those who possess the inner vision alone will perceive truly the esoteric underlying secrets involved.

After perusing this LALITOPAKHYANAM, it becomes refreshingly so very pleasant and encouraging to approach the Divine MOTHER in Her beatific incarnation as Sree Rajarajeswary or Sree Lalita Maha Tripurasundari whose beauty of Form is unequalled in the three worlds -as described ably by Sree Adi Sankara in his SOUNDARYALAHARI.
Though, at first, the several YOGINIS that surround Sree Devi Lalita try to throw obstacles in the path of the seeker,if the determined devotee persists in his appeal to Mother Lalita, the very same Yoginis readily clear his path of all deterrants and actually assist the devotee in reaching the Lotus Feet of the Supreme Mother, who absolves one from all cares and grants all one's requirements and needs unasked, not barring the eternal BLISS OF MOKHSA.

The following INTRODUCTION has also been translated from the original Sanskrit version. It forms an integral part of Sree Lalitopakhyanam.

Mallem. Sree Venugopal Rao

of Deeksha - name

SRI KRISHNANANDANATHA

INTRODUCTION

Devarishi Agasthya was well-versed in the VEDAS and VEDANTA. He knew all SASTRAS; and had tasted the DIVINE BLISS. For LOKA-KALYANA he undertook a pada-yatra from the Himalayas to the south of India. He passed through many a pilgrimage-centre famed for its OCCULT significance. Travelling thus, among thickly-forested Vindhyas and other mountain ranges and across sacred lakes and rivers, cities and villages, he wondered at the sight of tamasic ignorance overwhelming the hordes of human-beings who, deluded by their out-going senses, were ever intent on their interaction with the objects of the senses, and frittered away their precious lives in merely satisfying their immediate physical needs of hunger, thirst, pleasure and procreation - not for a moment stopping to look INTO themselves to discover their REAL SELF in all its supreme splendour! He wondered, puzzled: 'Why do they not bother to turn their mind inwards, to gaze on their REAL SELF ? What prevents them from drawing their senses into themselves ? Do they not know what secret doors they can unlock if they could but STILL their minds? If they could but dive deep into the DIVINE SOURCE within them, what infinite BLISS would they not taste? What are all these external - pleasures but a drop in the ocean of BLISS within ? Why do they leave the bountiful SUBSTANCE and run after the scanty SHADOWS? Is there no way to convince them of their fallacy and help them to enjoy their DIVINE HERITAGE and birthright ? Is there no PATHWAY leading through BHOGA to YOGA? It is not easy to persuade anyone to leave 'The bird in the hand for the many in the bush': for, they would fain keep a firm hold of what is already in their possession! So, why not give them BOTH BHOGA & YOGA together ? Is that really impossible ?

There must certainly be a way to lead them to ineffable BLISS through paths other than asceticism, fastings, austerities and sanyasa. Spiritual babies as they now are, steeped in matter and blinded by passions, and rocking on the waves of pleasure and pain, of joy and sorrow, of poverty and riches, of starvation and surfeit, of love and hate, of laughter and weeping - they do not believe in a future life; nor do they care to think of it; they remember not their previous births or experiences. The PRESENT is all they are concerned with - for that alone is known to them; and all else is darkness and difficult of understanding! Deeply thus puzzled, the great RISHI AGASTHYA approached the sacred southern city of KANCHI famed for its many purifying DEITIES. There, at the summit of a hillock called Vaarana-Saila, he seated himself under the only mango tree, in the proximity of EKAMBARA-NATHA & DEVI KAMAKSHI the wish-granting MOTHER-DEITY.

Thus deeply concerned, in his search for the welfare of the masses, and determined to discover a PATH to MUKTHI & YOGA through BHUKTHI & BHOGA, Deva-muni AGASTHYA commenced a rigorous TAPAS aimed at propitiating VISHNU - Lord Janardhana. After a long time had thus elapsed, his efforts were rewarded with a VISION of LORD VISHNU in the Form of Hayagriva in the super-Buddhic-Plane of CHIDAKASA.

Lord HAYAGRIVA with a horse's head (signifying WISDOM) had four arms bearing a resplendent conch-shell representing the primeval SOUND Sabdha-

Brahman, a DISCUS Sudarsana Chakra representing the ever-active MIND, with streaks of lightning dispelling darkness of ignorance, a beatific ROSARY of beads signifying JAPA or meditation, and a holy-book of eternal wisdom.

The four quarters were filled with effulgence emanating from His Celestial figure. Beholding the Lord whose eyes were fountains of MERCY, the Muni who was himself immersed in that great lustre, was thrilled with ineffable joy; and he immediately prostrated himself before the dazzling Deity. Saluting again and again, he sang and praised the many leelas of Janardhana to his own heart's content.

Lord Vishnu, the protector of the three worlds, addressed the Sage thus: "O thou chief among sages, I am pleased with your tapas. Ask me a boon. Fear not!".

Agasthya was filled with great expectations; and he spoke in humble and gentle words thus: "O Lord of Luxmi ! If Thou art pleased with my humble efforts, kindly indicate to me, forthwith, the PATH of DELIVERANCE for the deluded people of this world, so that they may easily find happiness here as well as freedom from the bondage of repeated - births. Is there a way for them to realise Mukthi through BHOGA itself, without recourse to austerities and penance ?"

Govinda, the great shepherd of humanity, being pleased at this request, replied thus: "This is indeed a great question pregnant with self-sacrifice; nay, it is thy LOVE for the greatest ONE REAL SELF of all that you have performed this great tapas, not with any selfish intent, but for the welfare of all living beings. You are indeed a Mahatma ! It was Shiva who first put this question to me ages back. Brahma was the next to seek enlightenment on this subject and, later still, Durvasa; and it is now your own question. There are not many who would perform severe austerities, such as you have endured, with an eye to the welfare of deluded humanity. I shall certainly clear your doubts after first initiating you into the secret of my OWN SELF; and may this knowledge, which is the key to the answer to your question, be spread to all corners of the three worlds by your effort:

"I am the beginningless Creator of all that IS; I am the Lord of Lords and free to do as I please; I am the cause of creation, preservation and withdrawal of this Universe- both manifest and unmanifested- and all is part of My own being. I am the Trinity: Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, and I am also beyond all qualities: Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. Though free from all qualities, I am their resting place, and their support. I need no special resting place for myself for I am imminent everywhere. I am the ATMA of all- the primeval creative SPIRIT. I am in the creation and also outside creation. All the threefold Universe is as my apparel, a part of myself. You can, therefore, be always AWARE of MY PRESENCE; I exist in two forms: Sath & Chith. As SATH, I am above all qualities, unmanifest and omnipotent Silence ever present and imminent.

As CHITH, or Pure Consciousness, (Sarva-Bhutha-gunatmaka), I exist as the primeval ATMA in the hearts of all the manifest, bound as they are by the three gunas.

Know that both Sath & Chith are one and ONE ALONE and not apart. "Sath-Chith-Ekam Brahma"

My unmanifest FORM is most difficult to attain. This Jnana is the result of unremitting tapas characterised by courage, tenacity of purpose, self-sacrifice and destruction of all karma -both evil and good. Final union with Me is attained when the YOGI rises above all qualities and all actions through self-restraint. Difficult indeed is this PATH except for a meagre few.

My manifest FORM, on the other hand; exists in and as the Universe of CHITH svarupa -My SHAKTI or Divine Energy; and enjoys great omnipotence through Karma-bhoga represented by the Yoga-kshema of the universe and its beings. This purushothama Form of Mine is not difficult of attainment, and there are two ways of attainment: Through KARMA and Through KARMA-THYAGA.

The second path of Karma-thyaga arises from VIVEKA & VAIRAGYA. This detachment is also difficult, except for a select few. The first path of KARMA, however, is free from danger and easy to follow, for, all that is required is the discrimination between sath and asath in all one's actions.

The SATH, as also the CHITH or consciousness is all-pervading and all - supporting ATMA; and the ASATH, the apparent chith or consciousness, is due to the action of the three qualities. This knowledge of the unity of all in the one all-pervading Sath & Chith as Paramatma is alone sufficient to secure all Siddhis. This 'FORM', which is MY SHAKTI, as the ATMA of all- is the FORM of DEVI TRIPURA - SUNDARI or LALITA RAJARAJESWARI who is threefold as Gross, Subtle, & Para-(Causal) - ALL IN ONE.

This ATMA-SHAKTI or Divine-Consciousness is a manifestation of Chith-jyothi (light of consciousness) which is the SOURCE of all the myriad multiple shaktis or energies in the threefold universe. Nothing exists or is conscious or moves or acts or feels or thinks but it is HER SHAKTI or POWER. She is CHAITANYA or Chid-Rupini. No matter to what religion, caste or colour or creed or sex one may belong to, no matter whether one is pure or otherwise, all have the freedom to worship this, their own ATMA-SHAKTI which is personified as DEVI TRIPURA SUNDARI or LALITA RAJARAJESWARI. Constant meditation or dhyana on Her beautiful FORM ALONE is sufficient to remove all evil, and usher in all the GOOD. Lalita Rajarajeswari, as Divine Energy, is the Chith or negative, active or dynamic aspect of Sath-the positive form, generally labelled as Purusha or Kesava or simply KRISHNA. Hence the saying:

"LALITA PUMRUPA KRISHNA". The dual form of GOPALA-SUNDARI, or the SEXLESS-ATMAN.

Whether performed as per prescribed rules of external worship or not, the dhyana on the subtle or gross form of this PARA-SHAKTI of PURUSHOTHAMA will spontaneously, automatically and without a doubt, bring about prosperity and all auspiciousness, ending in Mukti or freedom from the wheel of repeated births.

Thus, the easiest and safest and most direct path to the attainment of both BHUKTI & MUKTI (that is, all desirable enjoyments and powers in this life, as well as ultimate freedom) is the contemplation on LALITA as the United Atma-svarupini of all the apparently multiple consciousnesses prevalent in the threefold-universe.

To succeed in this contemplation or worship, which means becoming ONE with the ATMA-SHAKTI of the universe, certain shortcuts or YUKTI-MARGA are prescribed, which will hasten a devotee towards his GOAL. The ARROW which helps him/her to hit the TARGET is the *PANCHA DASAKSHARI MANTRA* which is the Mula Mantra and sukshma form of the dual DEVA-DEVI:-

> *"Om Ime Hreem Sreem, Ime Kleem Sauh,*
> *Ka A Ee La Hreem, Ha Sa Ka Ha La Hreem,*
> *Sa Ka La Hreem Sreem Hamaah"*

The NYASAS help concentration of the mind as well as the purification of Prana, the emotions and the physical body as well as the REALISATION OF THE ATMAIKYA JNANA which dawns WITH ALL THE POWERS PERTAINING TO SUCH UNITY. THIS SECRET HAS BEEN REVEALED TO YOU SO THAT YOU MAY USE IT FOR THE WELFARE OF THE THREE WORLDS. I am well pleased with your tapas for the welfare of humanity, O great MUNI.

In all the worlds, the devas, munis, siddhas, men, women, and others shall learn this divine secret from you, and thus obtain all siddhis, leading from bhoga and bhukti to yoga and mukti.

When Lord Hayagriva had thus ceased speaking, deva-rishi Agasthya prostrated before Him in great humility and, rising again, put the following questions to the slayer of Madhu:

"Lord, what is the gross form of Sree Lalita Maha Tripura Sundari ? How and why did she assume this Her incarnation in human form ?

Kindly describe to me the great deeds performed by Her as well as the esoteric significance involved in all HER ACTS. Kindly enlighten me. Lord Hayagriva said again:" O great Soul, this here Maharshi Hayagriva living in the material world, born of my own thejas, of qualities free from faults, is also wisdom and kindness personified. He will reveal to you all that you desire to know. You may put all your doubts before him".

So saying, the great Lord Vishnu of the form of Hayagriva disappeared from the Buddhic Plane of the Rishi's consciousness.

Agasthya was thrilled with surprise at the sight of Maharshi Hayagriva standing by his side. With great reverence, he escorted Maharshi Hayagriva into his ashram and, offering him all hospitality and a high seat to rest on, asked him the following questions calculated to benefit the three worlds.

Agasthya - O knower of all Dharma and Truth ! It is indeed for the welfare of the three worlds that darshan is obtained of merciful beings like unto thyself through the abundant grace of Almighty. Kindly, therefore, relate to me, in detail, the manner of coming into being of Sree Devi Lalita Maha Tripura Sundari, Her various avatars and leelas.

Maharshi Hayagriva - Listen, O Sage! The beginningless Mother of all the Universes, the One who is recognised only through contemplation, She whose Para Form is condensed wisdom personified, Who resides in the hearts of all as the ONE ATMA, whose subtle Form is all-benefiting ACTION and ENERGY involved, was evolved as one great ATMA of all, resplendent and all-powerful. Thus all-merciful Mother Lalita rose as Kamesvari out of the chidagni flames into which the devas and their retinue had made sacrificial offerings in complete self-surrender. She first re-vitalised the devas and their retinue in brighter forms. Together with Her Lord Kamesvara, She saved devas from danger, and fulfilled their wishes.

The Second Avatar of Devi materialised as MOHINI merging with the Form of Lord Vishnu after churning of the Milky-Ocean by the devas and danavas. The celestial beauty of MOHINI was such as to attract and delude even Lord Shiva the bearer of the trident and the vanquisher of Cupid. He was so charmed by her that he left his spouse Parvathi and running up to Mohini, embraced her tightly in his arms. As a result of this act was born Dharma-Sastha (Ayyappa).

Agasthya was astonished to hear of this incident; and he requested Maharshi Hayagriva to narrate the episode in greater detail for he could not conceive the vanquisher of Cupid as being brought under the spell of the vanquished;

Indicating that it was a long story, Maharshi Hayagriva started as follows, beginning with Muni DURVASA'S CURSE ON INDRA the king of the gods of svargaloka.

MUNI DURVASA CURSES INDRA

Once, Indra became very proud and haughty due to his great prowess and sovereignty over the three worlds. "Vijayasri" and "Nithyasri" the Goddesses of Victory and Wealth ever showered their grace on him; so he ruled the three worlds with credit; One day, as he rode on his snow-white elephant Airavatha amid the applause and cheers of his devoted populace, Durvasa approached Svarga-Loka, clad in deer's skin. His body smeared with ashes and staff in hand, he looked like a mad man. He had been sent by Rudra to curb Indra's pride. On the way, he met a beautiful Vidyadhara maiden who was carrying a garland of flowers with which she had worshipped Devi Sankari. This she respectfully offered to Durvasa; for he was also a great devotee of Devi Sankari. On being blessed by him, she gave him her Vina also and went her way. Durvasa thus proceeded on his way singing and playing on the Vina. When he saw Indra on his Airavata he gave the garland to him as a gift. Instead of wearing it around his neck, Indra put the garland over the head of his elephant. Airavatha took hold of the garland with its trunk and, tearing it asunder, threw it on the ground. Durvasa was full of wrath at this and berated Indra for disgracing him thus and slighting the garland of Goddess Sankari, which even Brahma would have worshipped with great devotion. He thereupon poronounced a curse on the haughty and power-blinded Indra, that he and his three worlds would be henceforth bereft of Vijayasri and Nithyasri. Indra's splendour faded immediately. Vijayasri the Goddess of victory left him and approached the ranks of the Danavas; Nithya Sri the Goddess of Wealth returned to Lord Vasudeva. Indra was now troubled

at heart. He immediately returned to Swarga Loka and, sending for his preceptor Brihaspati, addressed him thus:

INDRA AND BRIHASPATI DISCOURSE ON DHARMA & ADHARMA

"O Great Guru! Thou knowest all Dharma and can see the past, present, and future; I am beset all around by ill omens most unexpected. What they portend I do not know. Neither the remedy nor the way of escape can I see! " Hearing this, the Deva-Guru spoke up in words consistent with Dharma.

Brihaspati: Listen, O Indra! Every action that one commits, knowingly or unknowingly, bears fruit sooner or later; and unless and until such fruit of action - good or bad - is enjoyed by the agent of the action and unless he does other suitable penance or prayaschitta to nullify the result, the latter never perishes even though it has to wait a hundred years; and fulfils itself spontaneously when suitable conditions and circumstances present themselves.

Indra: O great Guru! Kindly instruct me in detail and tell me *what is Karma and how its results may be nulllified by suitable means.*

BRIHASPATI: Listen, O Indra! Evil Karma, or that which has suffering as its result, is of five kinds:

(1) Thefts or misappropriating what belongs to another,

(2) Himsa or causing hurt to other living creatures;

(3) Drunkenness or imbibing excess of wine without offering same in Worship;

(4) Killing for self-gratification and pleasure without purifying same through offering to Devatas.

(5) Adultery and consummation of sexual-appetite for purely sensual gratification.

These are the five evil karmas of a danava; and their fruit is bitter indeed! *There is no expiation for sins committed against father, mother, son or Guru.*

If such evil Karma be set into motion by a Deva who is far wiser than a Danava or man, the harmful result is multiplied ten thousand times. *The punishment is automatically adjusted and meted out in each case, according to the development of the individual in the scale of evolution.* If sin be committed for the sake of relations, friends or dear ones, the punishment is reduced by one-fourth; and one-half if for the protection of one's self, wife or child. When it is done as a duty for duty's sake, there is no sin! *Munis of Yore have said that when in danger of losing life, one may defend oneself against anyone or anything even to the extent of killing the aggressor;* and it will be no sin to do so. Actions which cause troubles to wife, children, or brothers have their sinful retribution multiplied ten times. When these are saved, the reward is similarly multiplied ten times. Sat-sangha is a great expiatory agent in all cases, as it creates repentence and wiser resolves.

It is not sinful for a ruler to kill wild animals in a forest for the protection of his people. To purposely kill animals for one's own food or pleasure without offering to the Devatas as sacrifice is not free from sin. The flesh that is offered in sacrifice is born of Siva the destroyer and therefore quite auspicious. Hence, O Jiva! know this; You are not different from Siva; but of the form of Siva. Knowing that Rudra is the Lord of the Universe for it is in His power to destroy it, if the sacrifice be even mentally offered to Him with that knowledge and the remnants of such an offering be used for one's self or for others, one incurs no sin. *Also, such as are harmful to homes like snakes, rats, scorpions, mosquitoes, red and white ants etc. may also be destroyed without incurring sin.* This animal-sacrifice (Yajna) has been declared for the *sake of Grihastas who desire the fruits of their actions.* For the others, *desires are fulfilled through Japa, homa, archana,* etc.

INDRA: Great Guru! Through your kindness, I have been able to understand the intricate secrets relating to himsa and the punishment thereof. Thou hast averred that theft is a great sin. Kindly explain this to me and remove my doubts.

BRIHASPATI: O Indra! The Shastras proclaim that it is a great sin to kill. Greater sin is to hurt a Saranagata- one who has surrendered himself and sought refuge- whoever he may be! Even to look upon such a great sinner is itself a sin. *There is no expiation for the sin of robbing a wise man or one who has earned money through great effort, or an unfortunate and poverty-sricken individual or one who has too many children or wives, or one who is living on his past-earning not being able to earn now.* It is a greater sin to rob one who trusts. Greater still is the sin if one who trusts happens to be poor. I shall relate to you a story to illustrate other intricate secrets involved in the fruits of theft.

STORY OF KIRATA NAMED DVIJAVARMA

Once, in the town of Kanchi, lived a robber by name Vajrakhya. The people of this town were well-to-do, healthy, happy, lovers of truth, with minds and senses under control, full of kindness, and blessed with all prosperity. The robber Vajrakhya was soon able to increase his stock of pilfered goods little by little until it became so great that he, as a miser would, hid it all under a tree and covered it up with a stone for a sign and began to live far away from that hiding place. A hunter, happening to pass that way with a heavy load of dry wood rested at the place, and finding the money hidden under the slab of stone took away a portion of it to his home and spoke to his wife thus: "As I was bringing a load of fuel in the deserted jungle I came across this money. As you were always desirous of having plenty of wealth, I brought this to you." She accepted it most happily and said: "There was a certain poor but wise Brahmin who visited our house often for charity. On seeing me he prophesied once, saying that I would soon become very wealthy. Indeed, that there would be no woman wealthier than myself in this town. That although in days of yore, the valmika - born had cursed that Luxmi would not tarry long in the homes of Bhils, hunters, actors, etc., yet I would be still wealthy for quite a long time. The sight of this wealth now has proved this Brahmin's words to be true. Also, it has been said that wealth earned through hard work always lasts longest and that which comes freely of itself should be utilised for the welfare of all people. Therefore let us now

use this money for the construction of a large irrigation-tank." Being pleased with what his wife had to say, the hunter became busy and selected a large area lying to the west of the town and started construction of a very large tank which would hold the otherwise wasted water of the surrounding country. After paying the masons and workers all the money he had with him, he found that the tank was still incomplete. He fell to thinking thus: "I brought away only part of the treasure. There is much more left behind. I shall bring this also bit by bit." He was thus able to complete the work of the tank. He then built a temple to Lord Vishnu in the middle of the tank. Soon the tank was full of purest water. He also built another temple for Sankara in the midst of the water. Where the forest had been, he cleared all the trees and built inns and choultries and distributed them to Deva Brahmanas. He gave them, in charity, much gold and clothes and made them all contented and happy. He then addressed them all and said: "How is it that a Kirata, who lives by selling fuel, has become so wealthy? How build a great tank, how construct temples to Gods and choultries? and distribute lands to you all? It is all through your mercy that I have been able to accomplish all this. Pleased with the kirata and his devoted wife, they praised their noble actions, and christened them "Dwijavarma" and "Seelavathi". These two then collected all their relatives and continued to live and serve the people well. The new place thus created by clearing the jungle they named "Devarathapuram".

When Dwijavarma and his wife reached the end of their lives, the messengers of Yama, Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra came thither and began to quarrel among themselves as to who should take possession of the two souls. Narada approached them and said: "Please stop your quarrelling and listen to my words. This Kiraata constructed the tank etc., with stolen money. Hence he will have to wander as a (Vaayu-Bhoota) ghost till all the rightful owners of the wealth also die and leave their physical bodies". On hearing Narada speak thus, all the messengers went their way.

For twelve years after that, Dwijavarma was to remain a Vaayubhoota before entering antariksha. Narada spoke to Seelavathi and said that while she was free from all fault, she was really responsible for all the good done to the populace; and so she could go immediately to Brahma-Loka. But Seelavathy said she would not leave her husband who had become Vayu-bhoota but would wait till he realised his bhoga-body (mental or heavenly) and would go wherever he went. She added: "If there be any (Parihara) expiation that I can perform so that my husband may attain his bhoga-body soon, please instruct me; and I shall do accordingly. Narada said: " If you desire that your husband be granted a bhoga body soon, I shall certainly enunciate a sure method for you. You shall fast and bathe in the Mahatheertha daily and worship Siva with Ambika and then eat only roots and fruits. Your mental worship to Mahesa should be Sata Rudra Mantra Japa. Even Brahma-hatya sin is washed away by1008 Japa of this Mantra, so, without doubt, all other sins". So saying, Narada initiated her into Rudra dhyanam and vanished. Seelavathi did as Narada had instructed and soon Dwijavarma gained his bhoga body and went to Swarga-Loka with his wife. Then the robber Vajrakhya also died; and soon the several original owners of the wealth that was utilised for building the tank, etc. also left their physical

bodies. Yama called Vajrakhya and those others also to him and questioned as to whether they would suffer for their ill-deeds first and then enjoy heavenly bliss for their good-deeds or vice-versa? They all wished to go to heaven first; and so it came to pass they soon joined Dwijavarma and his wife in Svargaloka. Dwijavarma soon surmounted Svarga, became a Pramadha-gana and stays to this day in Kailas.

On hearing the above story from Brihaspati, Indra wanted to know how Dwijavarma's good deeds were shared among the others. Brihaspati continued and said: "Dwijavarma and his wife got half share of the reward of the good deeds, the robber Vajrakhya received half of Dwijavarma's share, and the balance became the lot of the others. *The sins committed by word or deed can thus be expiated by suitable good actions for the welfare of the world.*

INDRA: Kindly enlighten me in detail as to the kinds of drunkenness, its qualities, disadvantages and faults and expiation.

BRIHASPATI: There are varieties of wine, suitable and unsuitable depending on the type of wine as well as the one who drinks. Soma is essential during the worship to Luxmi, Sarasvathi, Gouri, Chandika, Tripurambika, Bhairava, Bhairavi, Kali, Mahasaasta (Ayyappa), etc. A Brahmin who is well-versed in Vedanta must without fail use pure wine when he prays to Deva Devi for the fulfilment of his desires. When wine is thus offered as Naivedya to the Deity and taken as prasad it is very beneficent; and no harm or sin will accrue to such a worshipper. *Whether knowingly done or unknowingly, prayer at the Lotus feet of Deva Devi will cleanse one of all sin; and that is the expiation paramount.* If anyone drinks wine or other intoxicants without first offering it to Devi, he is sure to incur sin; for he has drunk for sheer enjoyment. The warriors may partake of certain varieties of drink. The merchant-class and the hard working manual labourers also may drink, including women; but it is always to be taken as a prasad after mentally offering it to their Deity, and never in excess. *Widows, Unmarried virgins and women in menses should not touch any variety of wine.* A *married woman who drinks freely before a stranger* (one who is not her husband) *is akin to a mad woman; and should be avoided.*

ON ADULTERY

INDRA: O great Guru! tell me in detail about the sin of adultery and its expiation.

BRIHASPATI: Adultery committed with mother's sister, Guru's wife, maternal uncle's wife has no means of expiation. In all other cases, *fasting and Japa may be resorted to with deep repentence.*

Any man who mates with his *wife during her menses* must bathe and change his clothes; and that day and evening he shall fast and pray to Devi in order to become pure again.

From Brahma down to the ant, all the moving things in the world are dependent on food, sex, sleep and desires always. It is impossible to live without food; and food creates passion. It is most difficult again to control passion. In the beginning

of creation, Lord Vishnu created all the worlds through Brahma. Then through Manmadha (Cupid) Brahma created male and female duality of life subject to birth, growth and decay as per Prakrithi or laws of nature. All life is controlled by Pravritti. If this Pravritti be avoided, there will be destruction only. That Mukti which is said to be the fruit of Nivritti (the opposite of Pravritti) may also be obtained through Pravritti. This Tantra or Yukti (short and easy method) which is a great *secret of secrets, I shall now declare to thee; listen thou carefully.*

The primeval Prakasha-Purusha, Vasudeva, is the Atma (Sarva-antaryami) of all the "SAT" the invisible, unchanging spiritual aspect of the seen and unseen. The cause of the visible and invisible material aspect which is ever-changing and moving, is His Reflection Vimarsa-aspect "CHIT" or Mula-Prakriti or Maha-Luxmi the Mother of the three worlds. *For the continuation of life, and for the satisfaction of the mind ruling over the twenty-five Tattvas* or principles, the *Eternal Couple have ordained the mating-instinct among all life.* Knowing this, whosoever mates with his spouse (Sva-Sakti) meditating on the meaning of the samsiddha Mantra will be doing his duty as ordained by the Divine couple; and will therefore be free from all fault. That Mantra-bhaavana is as follows:

"This my wife is part of the universal female principle representing Sakti Herself in essence; and I am part of the universal male-principle representing Purusha Himself in essence; As the husband and spouse of this my sva-sakti, it is my duty to satisfy and still the craving of the Twentyfive Tattvas in both of us. I am therefore performing this act as a duty ordained by the Eternal couple, and I do seek their blessing".

If mating be thus performed, the husband and wife will not be just satisfying a carnal and selfish desire but will be doers of God's behest. Not the slightest Karma or sin will touch them then, O Mahendra! This is a most guarded secret.

For every type of Sin, there is this one Yogapathya (Remedy or Sin-Destroyer). After bathing, with devotion and faith perform 108 Japa of Pancha-Dasakahari Mantra and pray to Deva Devi with sincere repentence. This will cleanse and purify one from all types of sins or impurities or faults.

INDRA: O Knower of all Dharma and well-wisher of all that lives! Can One's sins be shared by others? Please tell me clearly.

BRIHASPATI: There are only a few ways in which a sin may be shared by others. The one who commits the sin has the full consequences to suffer. Next, whosoever helps him in committing the sin, as an associate, suffers one-tenth less. The one who is responsible for instigating the commission of the sin suffers two-tenths less. He who permits the sin to be committed suffers three-tenths less. You must know also that one may commit or incur sin by eating different types of food, depending on its source as well as the person cooking or serving it. What has been cooked in a combination of oil or ghee or jaggery/sugar causes no sin. Also by meditating on one's Diety and mentally offering the food and then eating it as prasad for the satisfaction of the several tattvas in the body which need food for the

maintenance of life, one incurs no sin. There are many ways of doing the above as prevalant among devotees of various Deities, as follows:

Before eating, sprinkle droplets of water on or around the food, uttering Japa of "Ǎnnasukta"; Japa of "Bhrigurvy varuni" Mantra chanting the sloka termed "Brahmarpanam", or after seven Japa of Mantra: "Idham Vishnu" with "Soham" bhavana or attitude of mind.

One may meditate on Sankara, make japa of "Tryambakam" and with Soham bhavana, and partake of food. O Mahendra! Listen to this secret:

Whosoever eats food daily after meditating on Para -Shakti and Kameswara with japa of Panchadasakshari and with bhavana of offering it to them is free from all types of sin connected with food and eatables. Besides, his poverty will vanish; diseases and enemies will flee. By constant "Soham" attitude (Atma-Ashtaaksari) "Om Hreem Hamsa Soham Svaha" one realises that all actions are the result of the modifications of gunas; and that all our acts through all our senses or mind or other tattvas are really activated by the myriad saktis or energies emanating from Paraa-sakti who alone works in and through us. This, in reality, is the gross form of the invisible spirit in each one of us. Realising this great truth and consciously dedicating all our thoughts and actions for the glorification of the Deity, we incur no sin, we do no karma to reap its fruit - good or bad. All karma is the result of Prakriti with the modifications of the three Gunas; and we only offer them mentally at the Altar of the Deity for the satisfaction of the various Tattvas or principles for the welfare of all.

I have thus far explained to you the five types of sin and their expiation. Now tell me what more you desire to know.

INDRA: O great Guru! Knower of the past, present and future, expert in wisdom relating to Dharma! Thou hast very kindly informed me of the several types of sinful deeds and the methods of expiation; and I have indeed become wiser! O thou abode of great qualities, kindly tell me what great sin I had committed and when? Do I deserve this present disgrace and danger to my position and my subjects? Kindly enlighten me also as to the mode of absolution thereof.

BRIHASPATI: Once, the effulgent Kasyapa Prajapati begat a son by name Dhanu and a beauteous daughter, Dhama, through his spouse Diti. As Dhama grew up to be a dazzling beauty, Kasyapa gave her as spouse to Brahma. Brahma begat through her an effulgent son by name Viswarupa who became a great devotee of the lotus feet of Kesava, and an expert in the knowledge of the Vedas. When the danavas appointed Bhargava (Bhrigu's Son Sukra) as their Guru, the devatas invited Viswarupa to be their Purohit. Viswarupa loved the devatas and agreed to be their Purohit; and forthwith engaged upon severe tapas. You were filled with envy at his becoming your equal; and *you killed him while he was performing tapas on* the three-peaked sacred Hill. No sooner was the ghastly deed committed than you were filled with remorse and fear of the resultant sin; you therefore fled and hid yourself among the caves of Kanakadri for quite a while. In the meanwhile, Brahma, hearing the news of his son's death, was filled with wrath and cursed you saying "May Indra become bereft of Luxmi through the power of my tapas!" Instantly, the devatas

were filled with fear and became panicky. Being now without a leader, the devas were being tortured by the danavas. Unable to bear these tortures for long, the devatas hastened to Brahma and, prostrating before him, surrendered themselves to his will, praying for forgiveness of Indra's grave and dastardly sin. Brahma was moved; but finding no remedy to remove his curse, he went with them to Narayana and, propitiating him, requested him to devise a suitable remedy. The most merciful Hari bethought himself and, dividing the curse into three branches, he let them affect all women, trees and the earth. They were also blessed by him so that women may bring forth children when they unite with their husbands during the sixteen days after their menses; that trees may have the power to grow again after they are cut down; and that the earth, when dug up into trenches,and pits may be filled up again automatically. As a result of the curse, thus divided into three branches, women have to undergo monthly periods of menstrual flow, trees the flow of their sap or juices (when cut), and saline or arid lands became part of the earth. Having thus been forgiven by Brahma, you left the caves of Meru and returned to your Svarga Loka. Brahma then spoke to Janardhana and said:

"Since my curse cannot be completely alleviated, in spite of thus being distributed, may Indra suffer its consequences not immediately but in course of time". Narayana, knowing the course of the future events, remained silent. You were thus able to rule the three worlds in great pomp and much splendour from that day on, until now. But being full of egotism and blinded by pride you caused trouble in Kailasa. Therefore, instigated by Rudra, Durvasa came along and found cause to curse you in order to curb your haughtiness and pride. His curse is akin to the earlier, latest curse of Brahma; and both brought about the same result. Look, O Indra! how soon the three worlds have become bereft of Luxmi! People have forgotten charity, tapas, yama and niyama, and have become weak of body, cowardly and atheists. The Earth is bereft of medicinal herbs, vigour and vitality. The Sun looks dusky. The Moon is dulled, and casts no light. Even Fire has lost its brightness. It does not bode well when all the directions including the sky look so dim, dull and dirty. The Devas have lost their powers, and wander about acting in strange ways. The three worlds, full of moving and fixed life, have lost their heritage!

***HAYAGRIVA*:** O Muni Agasthya! While Indra and Brihaspati were thus deliberating, the Lord of the Danavas, Malakasura, waxed strong. Gathering his armies together he invaded svarga-loka and began to destroy the palaces and their inhabitants indiscriminately. As soon as Indra came to know of it, he took his devas to Brahma and prayed for help. Brahma, in turn, took them all to Lord Vishnu and prayed for succour. Kesava, the knower of future course of Nature and things, spoke merciful words to them and instructed them to follow his plan of action, with great attention.

THE CHURNING OF MILKY OCEAN FOR NECTAR:

LORD VISHNU SAID: "Put medicinal herbs into the ocean of milk, go to the danavas and enlist their support; immerse the mountain Mandaragiri in the ocean and twist the snake Vasuki as a churning rope around Mandaragiri, while I support

and uphold the mountain over my (Kurma) Tortoise Form. Let the danavas hold on to the heads of Vasuki while the devas the tail, and churn the ocean vigorously, to and fro. First of all, try now to win over the danavas by suitable words. Tell them it is an easy job for them, that the result would be highly beneficial - yielding nectar which confers immortality on all those that drink of it. The danavas will agree hoping to steal the nectar away from you by force. I will see to it, however, that they do not get a chance to taste the nectar. You devas shall partake of the nectar and attain immortality besides becoming more powerful than the danavas".

HAYAGRIVA: O Agasthya! Having been thus instructed by Lord Vishnu, Brahma and the devas went to the danavas and, with appropriate promises, secured their willing support. They collected all the available medicinal herbs and immersed them in the ocean of milk; pulled up Mandaragiri and lowered it into the ocean of milk until it rested on the mighty Kurma form of Lord Vishnu the protector of the good and upholder of Dharma. They then twisted Vasuki in coils around the mountain like a rope for churning. The danavas held the head-end while the devas held the tail-end of Vasuki. They then churned and churned with all their might, while *Lord Prabha-Vishnu* sat on top of the mountain pressing it against his own Kurma-Form below. As the churning proceeded with increasing vigour, the danavas had the worst of it; for the poisonous vapours from the many heads of Vasuki burned their bodies and made them weak. However, they kept up their bravado to save their face and continued churning, though with failing energy. The devas, on the other hand, were blessed with cool breezes from the kindly glances of Lord Vishnu.

Besides upholding the mountain as a tortoise and pressing down its tip in another form, Lord Vishnu also moved amid the devas and kept encouraging them. In the form of a bright light or effulgence, He supported and sustained Vasuki also. He also saw to it that the danavas were not disheartened. So Lord Vishnu was thus practically everywhere controlling the entire operation in all its ramifications.

Witnessing the ocean of milk thus being churned by the cooperative efforts of both danavas and devas, the Siddhas who moved invisible about the sky were greatly surprised and marvelled at the unique sight! While they were thus wondering what it was all about, they saw *Varuni Devi (Surabhi, Kamadhenu)* arise out of the ocean and stand in front of the danavas, who did not bother to welcome her. So they thenceforward came to be known as "Asuras" because they did not accept or take "Surabhi".

Then Varuni Devi went over to the side of the devas who welcomed her joyfully in obedience to Lord Vishnu's secret signal to them with his eyes. Out of the ocean next rose UcccHaisrava the celestial white horse followed by beautiful celestial apsara dancers. Then, diffusing sweet and enchanting fragrance all over, rose up the celestial Parijata tree with flowers. All these were given to Indra the Lord of the devatas to keep in his Svarga-Loka. Next appeared the Moon, whom Hara took for his adornment. Then, there arose poisons which the Nagas imbibed. That which could not be assimilated by them, the Kalakuta - the opposite of Nectar, Lord Shiva swallowed and kept imprisoned in his throat which soon turned blue giving him the name of Nilakanta. This was followed by the emergence of a celestial jewel known as Kaustubha which Lord Vishnu wore on his chest.

Then arose the wonderful medicinal "Vijaya" a Mahoushadi which Bhairava accepted. Soon after, to the extreme joy of devas and asuras alike, there emerged Dhanwantari holding the vessel of nectar in his hands. Almost last of all, emerged Sri-Devi Luxmi in all Her Glory and splendour, with a smile on her face, with lotus blosooms in Her auspicious hands, and sitting on a red lotus bringing joy to the hearts of Maharshis who recited Devi-sukta. The Gandharvas sang Her praises; the Ganges and other sacred rivers approached Her; while the eight directional elephants supporting the worlds, bathed Her with sacred water from golden vessels held in their trunks. While Lord Vishnu was joyfully looking on at this avatar of his spouse, Sri Devi Tulasi was born (ever devoted to Lord Vishnu's feet) to the satisfaction of all Munis. Sagara, the Lord of the oceans, offered Sri Luxmi a garland of lotuses, Viswakarma offered her jewels studded with divine gems; thus decorated with celestial garlands and bedecked with celestial jewels, Sri Luxmi moved towards Kanchanachela (Lord Vishnu), who wore her on his chest to the joy of all. Sri Luxmi, thus having occupied Lord Vishnu's bosom, blessed one and all around her and showered her grace on all that beheld her smiling face.

LORD VISHNU ASSUMES MOHINI AVATARA

When the asuras beheld Luxmi occupying the bosom of their foe Vishnu, they feared that Vishnu would trick them out of their share of nectar. So Malakasura and his host hastened and snatched away the vessel of nectar from the hands of Dhanwantari. Then ensued a terrific struggle between the devas and the asuras for the nectar. In the midst of this fight, Lord Vishnu contemplated on Para Shakti and sought her help, while Brahma and Rudra left the place and returned to their respective Lokas. The body of Vishnu, who had been contemplating on Para Shakti, was transformed into that of a most alluring female form, so attractive and bewitching as to distract the attention of the asuras. They could not take their surprised eyes off her most exquisite form. To their great astonishment and delight, Mohini approached them fearlessly and said in a sweet voice that thrilled them: "Why do you fight? Give me that vessel of nectar and I shall distribute it". Unable to refuse her, the vessel was forthwith put into her delicate and shapely hands, while her bangles tinkled musically and charmed them. They were all so deluded as to become mere puppets in her hands. She then directed them to sit in two rows: The devas in one line, and the danavas in another. Holding a ladle in her dainty hands, Mohini doled out the nectar first to the devas. Thinking that the vessel might become empty by the time it reached him, Rahu son of Simhika became impatient and stealthily joined the ranks of the devas where he was also served nectar. But before he could swallow it, the Sun and the Moon signaled to Lord Vishnu (Mohini) who immediately chopped off Rahu's head. As it had already come in contact with nectar, it remained alive still: and Lord Vishnu, now no more in Mohini's form, vanished from their midst giving the empty vessel to the danavas. Realising the trick played by Lord Vishnu, the asuras rose in a body and fell upon the devas with intent to destroy them. The devas, who were now full of vigour and valour, having drunk of nectar, took up their weapons and routed the asuras who were weak and tired. The danavas therefore fled in all directions and hid themselves in Patala and other inaccessible places. Indra thus got back his Svarga-Loka and his old pomp and splendour; and Sri Luxmi smiled on him once again.

Thus having described to Agasthya the above episode of the churning of the Ocean of Milk, Hayagriva continued:

BIRTH OF MAHA SASTHA (AYYAPPA)

Narada, who had witnessed the wonderful scene with Mohini, as the heroine supreme, hastened with all speed to Kailas and with the permission of Nandikesa, approached Lord Shiva and Parvati and made obeisance to them. Hara welcomed the Muni, offered him a suitable seat and questioned him thus, "O, thou repository of all news! Knower of all that takes place in the three worlds, creator of quarrels and dissensions even among friends and lovers, you were present at the recent battle between devas and danavas for a share of the nectar. What wonders took place there? What did Vishnu do? What was the end of it all" To these questions, Narada replied thus: "O Deva! Although thou knowest all, thou hast asked me; and so I shall relate to thee what I have myself seen: While the asuras were getting the upper hand over the suras, and as the pot of nectar was still in the possession of the asuras, Hari lost no time in transforming himself into the most ravishing form of Mohini capable of deluding the three worlds, with the help of Para-Shakti Herself. This most enchantingly exquisite form of Mohini was bedecked in celestial ornaments which flashed like lightning and dazzled the eyes at every movement of her alluring body. The devas and danavas alike forgot their quarrels in that instant and gazed fixedly at her as though fascinated and struck dumb at her unique splendour of form and movement. The danavas obeyed her slavishly, and automatically handed over the pot of nectar to her without another word. The amazing Mohini distributed all the nectar to the devas. The danavas were too much occupied gazing at her form of delectable curves with tempestuous feelings of passion, to bother about what she was doing to the pot of ambrosia. Not till Mohini had put the empty pot before the asuras and vanished from sight did the danavas realise how they had been tricked and cheated out of their share of nectar. Overcome with keen disappointment and fuming with wrath they fell as one man on the devas; but the latter with renewed vigour, were ready with their weapons and successfully drove the danavas from their midst.

Narada's description of Mohini and her exploits filled Lord Shiva with great curiosity to behold her; and so he went to Vaikunta accompanied by Parvathi. Seeing the celestial couple approaching, Lord Vishnu rose from his Sesha-couch and welcomed them both with great respect and affection. Embracing Lord Shiva and offering them suitable seats, he enquired the cause of their sudden arrival. Lord Shiva spoke with humour referring to Lord Vishnu's recent impersonation as Mohini and expressed his great desire to see that wondrous form with his own eager eyes. On hearing Hara's request Hari smiled and vanished from their midst. With eager eyes, Lord Shiva began to search all around for the appearance of Mohini. Then on a spot beside a Parijata tree, he saw a Form-unseen ever before by him - bedecked with various fragrant flowers and sumptuously garlanded; a form so excelling in beauty of shape, curves and movement as to make one forget oneself and dissolve in that celestial mirage of beauty. At that spot blossomed also all types of fragrant flowers of all seasons of the year, alive with buzzing bees, with peacocks playing around a square tank of crystal pure water with floating lotus leaves and blossoms.

Lord Shiva's heart so merged with Mohini's enchanting glamour that he was overcome with passion to possess her. The more his eyes feasted on her delicious mien and movement the less could he control himself. He saw how her form scintillated with the varied hues of the rising sun, how it vibrated with vigour and charm; her feet were ruby tinted; as unto red lotuses were her dainty toes; the soles of her feet resembled red lac in hue; around her ankles were anklets frilled with tinkling bells; her calves were rivals to Cupid's sheath of flowery arrows; her shapely hips and thighs could scarcely be hidden behind her soft red raiment; her dainty waist was sustained by three folds supporting a deep, round swirling navel from which her torso widened and bloomed into two full and high breasts with teats tantalisingly veiled behind a semi-transparent bodice; pearl necklaces adorned her conch-like neck and played on her full bosom; her soft and smooth shoulders vied with the flowers of nature while celestial ornaments bedecked every part of her body, her chin shone like unto a mirror, soft in texture and almost transparent; her lips were full and red; the teeth seemed like so many moons; her nose-ring excelled a star in its twinkle; her eyes were long; her forehead rivalled the bright half-moon, her voice, as she sang or spoke to the birds, was more sonorous than the sound of vina; her ears were adorned with sparkling diamonds; the chewed betel leaves in her shapely mouth scattered the enchanting scent of fresh camphor and musk; she had on her forehead a tilaka of bright musk; her dark, luxuriant hair was adorned with kadamba flowers, while the hair-parting shone like a bright ray; a sparkling crescent- moon adorned her crest; her looks played with cupid; and her smile was bewitching; while the curves of her body were ravishing. All these, Lord Shiva took in at one glance and, forgetting himself and his spouse beside him, he ran to the side of Mohini and, taking her in his arms, embraced her over and over again. Coyly and tactfully, Mohini released herself from Shiva's embrace and ran away to hide among the enchanting flowery arbours; but Shiva was in the grip of Lord Vishnu's illusion and, unable to withhold his soaring passion, he succumbed to the arrows of cupid and ran after Mohini whom he forcefully held in tight embrace with such overpowering affection and love that his celestial and sacred Retas was set free and fell on the ground. The spot where the Retas had fallen was instantly turned to burnished gold; and in its midst was a divine baby, mighty in power and effulgence - who, to this day, is worshipped as Dharma-sastha (or Ayyappa). Mohini then vanished. "Queller of vindhya's pride! Shiva reached Kailas again with the help of his spouse Parvati". So saying, Hayagriva spoke again to Agasthya saying: "O Lord of Lopa-mudra! I shall now relate to you the story of Bhandasura which is a great secret undivulged before; and which removes all sins giving the freedom of Moksha to the one who understands its hidden meaning."

"Once Bhandasura the head of the asuras desired to create different kinds of danavas. From his right shoulder he created for himself a brother by name Visukra who was equal unto Sukracharya in his counsels and able to protect the company of daityas. From his left shoulder Bhandasura created a second brother Vishanga by name. In addition, he desired and created a sister for himself by name Dhumini.

Accompanied by his brothers and daitya warriors, Bhandasura set out on his conquests. Moving invisibly among the inhabitants of the three worlds and entering

their bodies, they sucked up all the Rasa or fluids and left their victims weak and shrivelled up. Even the Trimurtis: Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra hid in their respective Lokas unwilling to encounter the asura in battle, for they knew the extent of his prowess born of Rudra's own boons. All the devas and devatas lost their tejas and were panic-stricken, some fainted, some fled to the underworlds; some hid in the depths of the oceans, some in the hilly countries, some in inaccessible forests; some changed their appearances and lived incognito, forgetting svargaloka and bereft of their pristine vigour. The cruel Bhandasura was filled with pride and with his strong and harmful armies, he ruled and controlled all the lokas including Yakshas, Nagas, Siddhas, Sadhyas, Kinnaras, Gandharavas, Garudas, etc., slightingly looking upon Vishnu, Brahma and Rudra, as though they were quite insignificant. But listen, O Muni! Bhanda was soon destroyed and all the Lokas saved by Devi in another Avatar risen from the Chid-Agni-Homa of Para Sambhu wherein all living creatures including the devas and devatas offered their bodies in self-sacrifice. People call Her by various names, of which "Lalita" is one. She has a beautiful form with four arms bearing Noose (Pasa), Goad (Angkusa), Bow and five Arrows. A personification of Para-Devi well-versed in the arts of warfare, she utterly routed and destroyed Bhanda and his creations in a great battle.

Hearing Hayagriva speak thus, the Great Muni Agasthya questioned him again, saying: "How was Bhandasura born? How did Para-Devi Lalita happen to rise from Chid-Agni of Para-Sambhu? How was Bhanda destroyed in battle? I am most desirous of hearing it all. Kindly enlighten me."

THE BIRTH OF BHANDASURA

HAYAGRIVA: Listen O Muni! Once Sati Devi, daughter of Daksha Prajapati and wife of Lord Sankara, destroyed her physical body in her self-created Fire of Yoga Chid-Agni, at having been slighted by her father in the presence of all. Having thus lost his beloved wife Sati Devi, Sankara was shaken with wrath; and he brought forth Kala Bhairava who began his fierce destruction of Daksha's Yagna. After being thus appeased, Lord Rudra sank into deep silence of samadhi on the peak of mount Tuhina by the bank of Bhagiradhi in the Himalayas. Devi Sati, who had disintegrated her previous body, followed her Lord in spirit, to his ashram and was born there as Parvati, daughter of the King of Himalayas, Himavantha, in fulfillment of her boon to the latter.

When Parvathi had grown up, she was put in charge of Sankara's welfare to attend to all his needs and comforts as per Narada's advice.

In the meanwhile, the devatas were being tortured by the cruel Tarakasura. On the advise of Brahma, Indra and the devas proceeded to Cupid and spoke to him thus: "O Kandarpa! When Brahma had, of yore, created the worlds and peopled them, he began to wonder how to let them propagate themselves. He prayed to Vishnu who, pleased with his tapas, gave him a boon. Brahma expressed a desire that Vishnu should find a way whereby propagation of species may take place speedily and with ease, almost automatically. Lord Vishnu then looked upon his

spouse Indira and you were born as a result. Your appearance filled the worlds with moha and desire for union. Your arrows were magical,fragrant flowers; your bow was made of sweet sugar-cane. Vishnu then blessed you with success and invincibility and told Brahma "Manmadha will take care of the propagation of species according to their respective Karma, and you may just remain a witness (Vidhata)". We therefore come to you now for help. Filled with pride as a result of the boons secured from Brahma himself Tarakasura is torturing the inhabitants of the three worlds; and nobody can subdue him. He is especially bent on ill-treating us devatas. Only a son born of Siva-Parvati may conquer him, but Siva is now without a spouse, and is in deep samadhi, following the loss of Sati Devi. You alone can bring about the birth of Siva's son. None else can bring about such a miracle to pass at this juncture. Gauri is ever by Sankara's side doing all she can to make him comfortable but he opens not his eyes to behold her pristine beauty. If you will use your power and make him cast a loving glance on Gauri with desire for her, a son would immediately be born to Siva and the destruction of Taraka will thus be assured." Pleased by Indra's praise of his prowess,Kandarpa set forth to the Himalayas, and there beheld Sankara in samadhi with the divinely-beautiful Parvati sitting by him in great devotion. He let fly his invincible arrow at Shiva whereupon the latter opened his eyes and beheld the bewitching form of Parvati before him and he was moved with love. Immediately, however, he recovered his self-control and looked around for the cause of this disturbance to his samadhi.

Beholding Manmadha hiding behind a flowering bush with his bow and arrow poised, he grew furious; and, opening his Third Eye of Fire he reduced Manmadha to ashes instantaneously. Parvathi was shocked at what had happened on her account and, vowing to wed Shiva at any cost she went to her father and, with his permission, retired to the forest for severe penance.

Meanwhile, Chitrakarma-Gananadha saw the ashes of Manmadha and, being a chitra-karma - a skilled worker, - he moulded the ashes into a cadaverous human form. It became alive on being placed before Siva and shone with sinister effulgence. Chitrakarama Gananadha embraced him with great affection and taught him the great Sata-Rudriya-Mantra so that he may propitiate Lord Rudra and obtain boons to his heart's content. Accordingly, he worshipped Sankara with Japa of the Mantra. Sankara, being pleased with his faith and perseverance, bade him ask for boons.

He desired that half the strength of his foes during battle should be transferred to himself and that none of the weapons of his foes should have any effect on him. Granting these boons, Siva also gave him power to rule all kingdoms for sixty thousand years. He gave him many celestial weapons too; and disappeared from sight. Brahma, who had been watching all this with wonder, uttered the words "Bhanda, Bhanda" meaning "Well-done"! Hence he became known as Bhandasura.

BHANDASURA'S INSTALLATION

Hayagriva continued:- As Bhanda was born of the ashes caused by Rudra's wrath, his qualities also were akin to Raudra or wrathful. He became most invincible. Knowing all that had newly taken place, Sukracharya and his danava followers arrived

at the spot and welcomed Bhandasura as their King and Ruler. Bhandasura received the danava Guru with great respect and sent for the sculptor Maya. He ordered him to create a beautiful city in the place indicated by Sukracharya. Maya did so; and there was created Sonapura or "Sunya-Nagara" more beautiful than even Svargaloka. Then, in an auspicious hour, Sukracharya installed Bhandasura on the throne and invested him with the golden crown of power once presented by Brahma himself. He gave him the jeweled fans that dispelled all disease and sickness, a shield that gave protection from all manner of weapons, the bow called "Vijaya" (success), a fearful Khadga or sword and many precious jewels and ornaments. The following eight danava-chiefs became his ministers :

INDRASATRU,	AMITRAGHNA,	VIDYUNMALI,	VIBHUSHANA,
GRAKARMA,	UGRADHANVA,	VIJAYA, and	SRUTAVARMA,

Bhandasura then wedded four wives by name :

SAMMOHINI KUMUDINI CHITRANGI and SUNDARI

Through the influence of Time, Indra with all his devas and devatas became subjects to the daityas who grew stronger day by day. Following the advice of their Guru Sukracharya, the daityas vied with one another in their daily worship of Lord Shiva. Through Sankara's mercy, they grew in stature, and were blessed with children, grand-children and great-grand children. Each house excelled in the performance of Maha-Yajnas and vied with each other in the recitation of Vedas and study of Shastras! While previously the Devas had been receiving sacrifices at the hand of Munis and Rishis, they were now content with receiving similar offerings at the hands of these "virtuous" danavas filled with achara. Thus passed sixty thousand years with Bhandasura growing mighty through his tapas, while Indra became very weak and insignificant.

LORD VISHNU CREATES MAYA MOHINI

Watching the pitiful plight of Indra, Lord Vishnu the eternal foe of the danavas bethought himself of a means to bring down Bhanda from his virtuous life. He decided to tempt him to succumb to the wiles of Mohini. To this end, he created a most alluring damsel full of celestial charm and irresistible beauty and addressed her thus " Oh thou of golden eyes! your charm and beauty shall allure all beings and blind them with passion and moha. You may move with freedom and power over all beings; for none can resist you. Go forth, therefore, and win Bhandasura's love. Enslaving him to your allurements, make him forget all else, including Shiva's worship". Being thus blessed, Mohini requested Lord Vishnu to grant her the company and assistance of celestial damsels as well. Vishnu agreed and let Viswachi and other chief celestial maidens go with her. Maya-Mohini, thus accompanied by the choicest of apsaras, hied to the familiar pleasure-haunts of Bhanda and his retinue of ministers and courtiers. Seeing them all gaily engaged in amusing one another, Mohini selected an enchanting alcove in a beautiful garden by the edge of a tank of crystal-clear water and raised her celestial voice in melodious tunes to the accompaniment of her seraphic apsaras. Bhandasura and his retinue were all

intrigued; and they started to follow the voice to its source. Once there, Bhandasura was struck with wonder at the indescribable beauty of the damsel he beheld. For a moment, he stared spell-bound at her exquisite charm. Soon, recovering himself, he approached her like an automaton and begged her to accept him as her lover. Imagine his joy on receiving her instant consent! The other members of his entourage introduced themselves to the other damsels; and so all were soon engaged in courtship and love. Days, weeks, months and years passed by; and they remembered nothing else, immersed in their world of love and lust. Forgotten were their daily ablutions and homas and worship to Siva; all rules of conduct and acharas were set at naught. Bhandasura and his ministers bothered not about the affairs of State nor the welfare of their city nor subjects. Years rolled on, and even the Purohit who had gone to remind them of their daily duties was sent away disgraced. Thus enveloped in the moha of lust and passion among the celestial damsels, the danava chiefs passed a hundred and eight years; during this period, Indra and his devatas lived in peace in their Svargaloka.

While Devendra was thus seated on his throne surrounded by all his devas, he saw Maharshi Narada approaching. Descending from his throne, he welcomed the sage with appropriate salutations and courteous offerings. After seating him on an elevated seat, he said with great respect "O Greatest of all Munis! I am blessed by thy presence which always is a harbinger of good to come! I am eager to listen to thy wise advice and be freed from all cause for fear and sorrow. Please speak and dispel our ignorance and gloom." Narada was deeply impressed by Devendra's humility and spoke to him thus with gracious mien: " O Indra! Bhandasura is now immersed in his unquenchable passion for Maya-Mohini, and that has saved all other womenfolk from his clutches. He has now forgotten all else beside his love for Mohini who is none other than Vishnu-Maya. I shall now tell you how you may bring about his utter downfall: Go thou and perform Tapas to Deva Devi with all thy devas and devatas for necessary astras and sastras and for necessary help to vanquish Bhandasura. This is the most opportune time, while Bhanda is unaware of all that is going on around him in the three worlds. Go now and obtain the boon from Para-Devi before your enemies begin to mend their ways and themselves become heirs to Her mercy!" Thus, with the blessings of Narada, Devendra led his devatas to the Himalayas where they started tapas on the shores of the river Bhagiradhi.

DEVANDRA'S TAPAS

The devatas joined Devendra in his tapas on the banks of the Bhagiradhi, to propitiate Para-Sakti in their favour. This particular spot later became famed as Indraprastapura. Thus passed ten thousand years like ten days in Japa and Dhyana.

Sukra, the Danava-Guru, became alerted and betook himself to the spot where Bhandasura and his chieftains were whiling away their time with Mohini and the celestial damsels. He addressed Bhandasura thus, in gentle and persuasive tones: "O Chief of Kings! Though thou art their supreme Lord, the devatas are fearlessly roaming the three worlds at their pleasure; and the Lord of Rama is only waiting for an opportunity to destroy the danavas. Please realise that you have been blinded by love of none other than Vishnu-Maya herself, who, through her wiles, has made

you lose yourself in amorous and passionate acts to the exclusion of all else. Taking advantage of this lapse on your part, Indra and the devas are performing intense tapas to propitiate Para-Sakti desiring victory over you. If Para-Devi becomes pleased with their tapas, Indra is sure to bring about your downfall. Please, therefore, tear yourself away from the clutches of this Maya-Mohini and proceed with your ministers and armies to the Himalayas and put an end to the austerities and tapas of your foe without further delay. Please rise up now and tarry not any longer in your delusion; for it may be already too late to mend matters. Arise and save yourself while there may yet be some hope! Turn from that wily Mohini before she brings you woe! Please arise from this ill-advised torpor of moha and let wisdom prevail." Thus roused to action and brought to his normal senses by his Guru Sukracharya, Bhandasura left his couch of lust and called together all his ministers for consultation. Having been appraised of the situation, Minister Srutavarma spoke thus: " O Lord of the daityas! Sixty thousand years of undisputed sovereignty has been granted to thee by Lord Shiva as a boon. It is now long past that period; and several more years have rolled by. It would be therefore futile to think of retaining sovereignty much longer. It will not be possible for us to obstruct the tapas of the devatas. Weal and Woe are like two diametrically opposite points on the ever-revolving wheel of Time. We have had our share of happiness and power all these many years; now it is our lot to share the opposite for a like period. Hearing this, Minister Bheemakarna sprang to his feet and said; " O great and invincible hero of the danavas! It is ever unwise to allow the enemy to get stronger in any way. We can, and we must, put an end to their tapas by obstructing it at all cost! Victory shall be thine alone; for , has not Shiva granted thee a boon whereby half of the strength of thine enemies will pass into thyself? Nor can their weapons have any effect on thee! Hence success for thee is ever assured. Let us, therefore, rush to the place where our foes are performing tapas and destroy them without delay."

Bhandasura was thus roused to action; and he immediately gathered together his armies and marched to the Himalayas. Para-Sakti, whom the devas had been propitiating all these thousands of years, put up an illusory barrier around them so that the danavas may not molest them. Surprised, Bhandasura and his hosts wondered as to who could have cast such a barrier in their way so suddenly! However, Bhandasura soon became wrathful at having been thus thwarted in his attempt; and he smote the barrier with all his might with one of his veritable astras and succeeded in removing it. Para Devi immediately put up another barrier stronger than the first. This too Bhandasura succeeded in removing with the aid of his Maha Astra of Wind (Vayu-Astra). No sooner had the second barrier disappeared than there rose up a third and stronger one, stemming his advance. This also Bhandasura destroyed; only to find another barrier take its place! Having thus been repeatedly foiled in his attempt, Bhandasura lost his patience and retired to his capital in great frustration and deep disgust.

The devatas, in turn, were also frightened by the sudden appearance and disappearance of so many barriers near them; and not knowing their cause,made preparations to flee. Deva-Ramana intervening, accosted them and spoke words of encouragement to them thus: " I have seen our enemies, the danavas, approach

and then back away as a result of those barriers. Therefore, fear not! If you now flee from here, who is there to give you succour? Stay, therefore, and listen to what I say. It is impossible for us, as we are, to vanquish Bhandasura; nor is there anyone else; only Devi can rescue us. Hence let us continue our efforts and propitiate Her. Let us follow the Shastras in this respect; Parameswara will take care of the rest. It is not well to abandon and leave incomplete what we had gathered here to accomplish. Listen! I shall now outline our future course of action. Erect a homa-kunda measuring a yojana in accordance with the Kratu-rules and, kindling a most effulgent fire therein, feed it with all-available purified flesh as an offering unto Para-Sakti with all-sacrificing devotion, O Mahatmas! May we vanish through the great Homa-Fire and become part of the Brahma-Bhuta, if we cannot regain our Svarga Bhoga; for there is no other alternative. Accordingly, Indra and his suras jointly built the homa gunda as per plan and, chanting Mantras, kindled a great and glorious Fire tending it with purified flesh-offering. At last, all available flesh had been purified and offered into the Homa Gunda and there was no more flesh forthcoming to feed it. The devas, therefore, cut off their limbs and began to purify and offer them. As they were about to offer their entire bodies in sacrifice by flinging themselves into the great fire, devoutly and with the greatest of self-surrender a mighty blinding flash of immense brilliance burst forth from the flames - most unique and incomparable in effulgence and magnificence! The great mass of Jyoti was brilliant as unto the rising of a crore of Suns but diffusing the cool comfort of ten million moons. In the middle of the blazing mass was discernible the form of Sri-Yantra in the centre of which shone Para-Devi of the colour of the rising Sun. She was the sustainer of the Universe and the heart of Brahma-Vishnu- Rudra. She was the essence of all beauty personified and the ocean of ecstatic bliss, Her colour equalled that of the Japa-flower, her raiment the colour of Dhadimi-flower; she was bedecked all over with jewels and ornaments of celestial gems, pure and clear; she was the source of all Sringara and Beauty par-excellence. From the corners of Her eyes emanated rays of mercy like moon-beams; She had four arms bearing a Noose, a Goad, a sugar-cane Bow and five Flowery Arrows. The joy of Indra and the devas knew no bounds on beholding Para-Devi before them; and they all prostrated themselves before the August Presence. They made repeated salutations to this Atma of all creation. The Mother of the Universe turned her life-giving smile towards them and shed the lights of Her protective gaze on their bodies; and Lo! they were made whole, and their bodies shone with a celestial brightness making them strong, handsome and invulnerable! Thus freed from fear, and filled with deep devotion and ecstatic joy they sang aloud in praise of Kamesvari thus:-.

LALITA-STAVA-RAJA

Victory to Devi, Universal Mother, Devi Paratpara!

Victory to the abode of auspiciousness!

Victory to Kama-Kala-Atma!

Victory to the Left Eye of Kamesa!

Victory to the beautiful Kamakshi!

Victory to the adored and worshipped of all Devas!

Victory to Kamesi the Grantor of boons!

Victory to Devi, Brahma-mayi and Brahmananda!

Victory to Narayani Supreme!

Victory to Spouse of Srikanth, Victory to Lalitambika!

Victory to Sri Vijaya' Devi Vijayasri, the Grantor of prosperity!

O Thou cause of all that is, and all that happens!

Salutations to thee, O Paratpare, the Great Queen of the three worlds!

O, Atma of Kala, Kashta, Muhurta, the Day, Month, Seasons, Rithu and Year!

Salutations to Thee of Thousand hands and feet, radiant like unto the Lotus!

Anu of the Atom, O Devi! and greater than the greatest!

Beyond Paratpara, O Mother! and Effulgence of all Effulgence!

Thy feet touch Atala, Thy Knees are in Vitala, Thy waist in

Rasatala, Thy stomach in the Earth; Thy heart in Bhuvarloka,

Thy ever-smiling face in Svarloka; Thy eyes are the Moon,

Sun and Fire; Thy hands are the directions; Thy respiration is the Marut-winds; Thy speech all srutis; Thy play is the creation of the worlds, Thy companion Chinmaya Siva; Thy food is Joy ever, Thy abode is the Heart always; Thou art the visible and invisible worlds; The sky is thy head; the stars the flowers in Thy hair Thy arms are Dharma; and Adharma thy weapons; Yama & Niyama are Thy hands and feet; Asana Thy Ichcha Rupa; Thy breasts are Swaha and Svadha, the life of all the worlds; Thy Nose is Pranayama, Thy tongue Sarasvathi, Pratyahara Thy Indriyas (senses), Dhyana Thy Dhi Shakti; Dharana is Thy Mind and Samadhi Thy Heart, The trees are Thy hair, the dawn Thy dress; The past, present future and Eternity Thy Image; Yajna is Thy Form; Thou bearest the worlds; Thou art Time; Thou art the support of all people though they know it not; Thou art the root of Moha established, unknown, in all hearts; The Manifested Diversity with Name & Form are Thy Play (Lila). Seated in all, unattached, Thou grantest all desires! Salutations to Thee O Mahadevi!

To Sarva-Sakti - Salutations again and again!

Salutations to Parama - Sakti, Consort of Param Brahma,

To the granter of Brahmananda be salutations!

Salutations to Devi who controlleth the Sun, Moon and Fire; as also the wind, even all the five principal Bhutas (Elemental forces Prithvi to Akasa).

Salutations to Devi who existed before creation - who, through Brahma, creates and bears the worlds;

Salutations to Devi whose apparel is the Earth and the Sky, and who caused the birth of Savita;

Salutations to Devi from whom the Universe emanates - In whom it survives without fear, and into whom it dissolves again;

Repeated salutations to Thee who creates through Rajasic Sakti; Repeated salutations to Thee who sustains through Satwik Sakti; Repeated salutations to Thee who destroys through Tamasika Sakti; Again Salutations to Thee who is Shivam through Nirguna; Repeated salutations to Thee sole mother of all the worlds,

Repeated Salutations to Thee the sole Father, Mother of all the worlds; Repeated Salutations to Thee of the form of all Tantras;

Repeated Salutations to Thee of the Form of all Yajnas; Repeated Salutations to the Chief Guru of all the Gurus; Repeated Salutations to Thee as the Power of all Speech; Salutations to Luxmi the only satisfier of the worlds; Salutations again and again to Sambhavi the All-sakti! O Thou without beginning, middle or end - And beyond the source of the Five Bhutas!

O Thou who art inaccessible to speech or mind - Whose majesty is indisputable!

O Thou without Form, alone (not two) Invisible! How may one describe Thy grandest glory, O Amba! Welcome Visvesvari, worshipped by all Viswa!

Welcome Visvesvari of the Form of the Vedas!

Welcome Mayamayi, of the subtle Mantra-Form!

Welcome Sarvesvari of the all pervading Manifested Form!

Thus adoring Devi Lalita, Indra and other devas prostrated themselves again and again in complete self-surrender.

Pleased with their devotion, Devi asked Indra what boon he desired from Her.

INDRA: If thou art pleased, O Kalyani, do destroy the Daityendra. Life is unbearable because of him. Thou alone art our succour. We surrender all to Thee!

DEVI LALITA: I myself will destroy Bhandasura, the Lord of the daityas. Very soon, all the moving and unmoving in the three worlds shall be under your sway. Go ye all, therefore, in happiness, freed from all fear and anxiety, O ye devatas!

Whosoever reads or recites this my Stava with devotion shall be blessed ever with dharma, prosperity and wealth; with wisdom and power, with longevity and release from all ailments, ever delighting in the company of spouse, progeny and friends through my Grace!

Thus assured of succour from Devi Lalita, the devas were filled with great joy and strength; and they became aware of Devi's tender mercy from moment to moment!

BRAHMA AND OTHERS APPROACH DEVI

HAYAGRIVA: No sooner had Lalita pronounced these boons than there arrived Brahma accompanied by munis. Vishnu followed on Garuda, and Sankara on Nandi, accompanied by more munis, all eager and excited with great expectations. Then came Rambha, Menaka, and other apsaras followed by crowds of devas, Yakshas, Garudas, Viswavasu and other Gandharvas.

After they had all worshipped Devi, Brahma instructed Viswakarma to erect a beautiful city for Devi - impregnable to daityas. While this construction was underway, there arrived Durga the Adhi-devata of all Mantras, Syama the Adhi-devata of all vidyas, Brahmi and other Matrikas, accompanied by their many attendant Saktis and crores of Yoginis, Anima and other Siddhi-devatas, Bhairavas, Kshetrapalakas, Pramadhas led by Maha-Sastha, Ganapati, Vatuka and Virabhadra Mahaviras. All of them made obeisance to Devi Lalita and were struck by Her glorious beauty, Tejas and Power.

The great Viswakarma completed Sri Nagara consisting of many prakaras with abodes for elephants, horses and chariots, shining resplendent with broad and magnificient roadways leading to the Central Palace from the surrounding residences of ministers, armies, purohits and attendants. The Central Palace was a magnificent one with all entrances adorned with Gopuras, clustered with glorious rest-houses, leading to the Durbar Hall with the Lion-throne of Chintamani gems capable of yielding one's desires. Seeing this unique throne most beautiful and magnifient, Brahma began to wonder how Devi Lalita could be crowned on this excellent throne without a spouse by her side for the creation and welfare of the worlds! Looking around him for the most handsome of the Gods he could not find anyone fairer than Sankara; but the latter's apparel did not appear particularly auspicious with his ornaments of snakes and skulls besmeared with ashes.

SRI KAMESVARA APPEARS

While Brahma was cogitating thus, there appeared, all of a sudden, a celestial form, self-created, more handsome than a crore of cupids (Manmadha) put together. Bedecked in celestial clothes, anointed with sandal paste ornamented with crown, necklace, keyura and kundalas, he attracted the attention of one and all. Brahma rushed up to him and led the youthful Kamesvara to the presence of the Devi. The result of the exchange of glances between Kamesvara and Lalita was akin to the attraction between the opposite Poles of a Mighty magnet. Each seemed to be the complement of the other, longing for mutual embrace. No wonder, Kamesvara materialised soon after the manifestation of Lalita - His counterpart!

Feeling happy over this turn of events, Brahma addressed Devi thus in gentle tones: " O Jagadamba! Here are assembled all devas, rishis, gandharvas, and

apsaras intent on seeing Thee Seated on the Lion Throne by the side of Thy Purusha, equal unto Thee in all respects. Thou cannot be crowned Queen as soon as Thy wedding is concluded. This is very necessary for the welfare of the three worlds".

WEDDING OF KAMESVARI WITH KAMESVARA

Well pleased with Brahma's request for the welfare of the Worlds, Lalita showered on them the ambrosia of Her sweet smile and said: " There is none to rule Me, for I am ever free, O Deva! I do as I please and I go where I please. Who is there to control Me who controlleth all? Yet, if you will, choose the one equal unto me in all respects to be my spouse!"

In the hearing of all devas who were assembled there, Brahma spoke these words pregnant with Dharma:

There are four types of marriage mentioned in the Shastras: That of time, by purchase, given away by the father or guardian , and by her own choice. By the first, that of time, one is a *Vesya*; by the second a *Dhasi*; a *wife by the third,* and a *Gandharva* by the last. Thus are the maids named by the method of marriage chosen. It is best of all when the maid chooses from amongst her own equals and of her own dharma and is given away in marriage by her father or guardian to become a lawfully-wedded wife or dharma-patni."

As Brahma concluded, Vishnu, Sankara, Indra and the other devas mingled their voices in praise of Devi, praying Her to consent to wed: " O Devi! Thou art indeed the one - second to none - beyond Sat and Asat; Thou art Mula-prakriti and Atma of Chidananda - Brahma and Prakriti in one; Thou art the Beginning- less cause of all manifestation - Nay, both cause and effect art Thou. Sanaka, Sanandana and other yogis consider thee as the one Atma of both the manifested and the unmanifest, and as Sath-Asath *Karma-Rupini.* Thou alone art famed as *Pancha-Brahma-Swarupini-* being above the Trinity, Iswara and Sadasiva. Thou alone doth create all the worlds; Thou alone protecteth them, and Thou alone in time destroyeth all. In spite of all this, Thou art yet unattached to and untouched by all. Thou art ever free indeed! For creation, Thou dividest Thyself into two, that a third may be formed. We pray, therefore, that Thou mayst wed Thy Purusha - Thy otherself, for the welfare of this Universe.!"

Devi Lalita listened to them with a sweet smile playing on Her face; when they had stopped and made salutations to Her. She took hold of a celestial garland and, looking at Kameswara full in the face, sent the garland dancing into the sky. For a moment, it seemed poised in space; and then, descending, it adorned the handsome and conch-like neck of the youthful Kameswara. Immediately, there rained showers of celestial- flowers; and cool and gentle breezes wafted their fragrance in all directions, filling the hearts of one and all with ecstatic joy.

Thoroughly satisfied at this blessed Union of the Beginning-less pair, Brahma called upon Janardhana (Vishnu) and said that as the auspicious moment awaiting the welfare of all the worlds was fast approaching, the wedding of Devi Lalita with

Kameswara should be forthwith celebrated according to the Dharma-Shastras and with great eclat. Also, as Devi Lalita resembled him and was therefore like a sister to him, he should give Her away as bride to Kamesvara. Thereupon, while divine music swelled and flowers rained from the firmament, Lord Vishnu poured water in consonance with the Shastras and put Devi Lalita's hand in that of Kameswara, *uniting them in wedlock in the presence of all celestials, while apsaras danced and* devas sang praises extolling the Eternal Pair, who, though ever one, manifested themselves as the inseparable Pair for the purpose of creation. Then, in accordance with tradition, they began to make offerings to Her as the active, Shakti - principle of the Eternal Pair. Brahma presented Her with a sugarcane-bow, hard as diamond and indestructible; Vishnu gave her Arrows of ever-fresh flowers in an inexhaustible Sheath. Varuna the Lord of the Waters offered Her a Noose in the shape of live Snakes (Naga Pasam), Viswakarma gave Deví a Goad (Ankusa). Agni presented Her with a Crown while the Sun and the Moon gave Her a Kundala each for Her ears; Sagara the Storehouse of all gems made an offering of many a gem-studded jewel; Devendra gave a wine-vessel that is ever-full; Kubera a necklace of Chintamani Gems; Vishnu presented her with a gem-decked umbrella as a symbol of supreme sovereignty, followed by Ganga and Yamuna who made presents of fascinating fans and whisks for waving on either side of the sovereign Pair; Brahma, Vasavas, Rudras, Adityas, Aswinis, Dikpalas, Maruta, Sadhyas, Gandharvas and Pramadheswaras also made offering of diamond-hard arrows and other weapons similar to their own,each according to his status and rank. They gave Her also a chariot with horses capable of traveling with the speed of thought, virile, making free from illness and fatigue, as well as hunger and thirst.

THE CORONATION OF LALITA

In order to take the newly-wedded couple in procession to the Durbar Hall in the palace of Sri Nagara, Brahma got prepared a magnificent chariot by name Kusumakaram, sweetly fragrant with the scent of celestial flora, well supplied with invincible weapons of every available variety, and capable of traveling anywhere: on earth or in the firmament, and well equipped with all desirable articles. He who approached this wondrous chariot, near enough to inhale its fine fragrance, was instantly freed from all illusions, illnesses, hunger or thirst; thus freed from all wants he became filled with unalloyed joy and peace of mind.

As Sri Devi Lalita and Kamesvara boarded the Chariot Kusumakar, the Golden Umbrella was held over them while the fan whisks were waved beside them. In front of them unfurled and flapped the "Ananda-Dwaja" the Flag of Bliss. As the Chariot moved, flowers fell from the firmament and celestial music sounded amid the blare of trumpets and conches and beating of drums; pipes and stringed instruments filled the air with their enchanting music, while apsaras danced and fair maidens strew the path with fragrant flowers. Surrounded on all sides by devas and celestials, the Chariot moved slowly and majestically along all the streets of Sri Nagara. From every house, on either side of the streets, were made offering of sacred akshata and flowers, and incense and camphor-lights. When the Chariot reached the Durbar Hall in the Palace, the Celestial Pair *alighted amid the recitation* of Vedas and the waving of camphor-lights.

Entering the Durbar Hall, Devi Lalita and Lord Kamesvara occupied the great Lion-Throne and began to grant boons to every one assembled there, and fulfilling their every wish. They were both ever-smiling, showering tender mercy on one and all in the congregation. Brahma said Sri Devi Lalita was really Kamakshi and Kamesvari; for She was ever granting all desires to her devotees.

There were timely rains in Sri Nagara; and cool breezes wafted around, making glad all hearts. Each house contained its own Chintamani gem, Kalpataru, Kamala and Kamadhenu. What more could any one desire! Thus immersed in the joy of the Divine Couple the Trimurties as well as the other devas and celestials, Narada and the Devarishis, Vasishta and other Tapodhanas, those that normally dwelt in the heavens, the firmament and the earth amid pain, now lived in Sri Nagara free from all manner of suffering and sorrows. Each individual began to think " Here is my Vatsaladevi, full of mercy! Where shall I depart hence?"

As Supreme Lord of the world, Kamesvara granted boons to the learned in the wisdom; as the Supreme Queen and Mother, Kamesvari granted boons to one and all irrespective of their wisdom or learning. They thus reigned supreme over the three worlds, so that ten thousand years passed like unto a single moment. Then came Deva Rishi Narada to Kamesvara-Kamesvari and, humbly prostrating himself, said: " O Para Brahma and Parandhama! O Holy Paramesvari! Oh Thou Source of all Thoughts and Emotions, This Form has been assumed by Thee for the sustenance of the Universe, for the destruction of the wicked and the protection of the good. O Kalyani, it is for Thee to save us all from the clutches of Bhandasura who is even now tormenting the three worlds. Thou alone, of all the celestials, and none else can bring about his downfall. In Thy presence, the devas have spent a long time indeed in great joy, forgetting their respective Lokas and their various duties. Unless Thou sendest them away, they will not hie from hither. Everywhere , the Lokas look empty without their Rulers, while inauspicious omens abound".

Understanding Narada's anxiety, Devi sent for Brahma, Hari, Sambhu, Indra, the Dhikpalakas and the other devas and instructed them to get back to their Lokas and attend to their duties without fear, for She would Herself attend to the destruction of Bhandasura and his Sunya Nagara. She assured them of Her protection from moment to moment. Unable to leave Her presence easily, they made salutations to the Divine Pair over and over again; and with great difficulty, returned to their Lokas unwillingly and with heavy hearts, ever and anon looking back longingly. They felt as though they were leaving their respective souls in the presence of Deva-Devi while only their outward shells were proceeding to their own Lokas - for they were unable to bear the separation from the Divine Pair.

Whosoever readeth or reciteth this narrative of the Rise of Devi Lalita, Her wedding with Kamesvara and Her Coronation as Queen of the Worlds, with an understanding and devotional heart full of faith, shall be blessed with wealth and prosperity; his speech shall become gentle and sweet as nectar; evil and misfortune will take wing and flee from him; Fame shall reside with him; and he shall be considered chief among his people; Luxmi will remain with him steadily, attending to his welfare, ever. He will be freed from the three varieties of sorrow: Adhi-Bhautic,

Adhi-Atmic and Adhi-Daivik He will obtain the four Purusharthas: Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

In short, he who recites or reads even parts of this narrative during the two Sandhyas; dawn, and dusk, with dhyana of Simhasanesvari, such an one shall, within six months, be blessed with much wealth and prosperity!

Thus ends the Introductory Part of

Sri LALITOPAKHYANA

THE FULL STORY OF LALITOPAKHYANA BEGINS

AGASTHYA : O Thou of the Form of Hayagriva, the Lord of Indira: O Lord and Protector of the Universe and Mahodaya of the Vidyadharas: Ever immersed in the ocean of Wisdom and full of mercy, Many are the Devis and Devas who are most powerful and capable of granting various desires; but who, among them, is the Supreme Deity receiving due obeisance from all the many Devas, and Devis and Devatas? By whose Will does every one else attain success ? By being *ever aware* of whom do we human beings attain both Bhukti and Mukti (mundane prosperity as well as spiritual liberation) ? Is it not a popular belief that the Deity who grants Bhukti or worldly- goods does not confer liberation or Mukti? Also, are we not under the impression that the Deity who grants Liberation wants us to eschew, or abstain from all worldly pleasures? In this Age, it is practically impossible to persuade people to perform austere tapas or to leave all sensual pleasures for the attainment of liberation which, to their ill-informed minds, is a mere myth! Is there no golden mean, O Lord, whereby Liberation also may be earned by these many millions without being denied any of their sensual pleasures or even worldly prosperity? Nay, cannot they all live in great affluence and in full enjoyment of all the good things of this world without forfeiting their right to Liberation and freedom from future births ? If there be any such Deity who can grant both these, kindly shower Thy tender mercy and blessings on all these many crores of human beings by instructing me into that glorious of all Secrets !"

HAYAGRIVA: "Listen, O Chief of Munis! I am well pleased with thy request for the welfare of the worlds! The secret shall be thine and, through thee, the three worlds shall learn of it and be saved. There is certainly the One Deity, above all, who is worshipped by all the Devas, Devis, and Devatas without exception. All these in the three worlds derive their energy from this One Deity alone. This great Deity is the Mother of the Universe who manifested as Sri Devi Lalita or Kama-Kamesvari, the Queen of the mighty Shakti-yantra or Sri-Chakra ! At the beginning of creation, the unmanifest Brahman manifests part of Himself as the Primeval Adi-Purusha and Mula-Prakriti from whom emanate the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvara with their respective Saktis- - empowered with creation, protection and destruction of the worlds. Above this Trinity is Ishwara (the overlord of Maya - and the three worlds) who derives his Energy from Para-Sambhu or the ever-calm Sada-Siva (Lord of Suddha Sathva) who is ever in proximity with the primeval pair Kama-Kamesvari.

Once, when Bhandasura dried and shriveled up the creatures of the three worlds by sucking up their life-fluids with his prowess of Maya, neither the Trinity nor Ishwara nor Para-Sambhu were able to rescue them from his grip as a result of their self-surrendering sacrifices. However, the manifested Primeval Pair descended to this world as Kamesvara and Kamesvari; Mula-Prakriti, the mother of the Universe, rose

from the Homa-Fire of Sada Siva" Chid-Akasa, as Sri Devi Lalita, seated in the middle of Her Sree-Chakra, supported by the Supreme Adi-Purusha as Kamesvara. Devi Lalita or Kama-Kamesvari restored the creatures of the three worlds to their pristine vigour and health by delivering them from the clutches of Bhandasura and his Maya by vanquishing him in battle and by the extinction of his city and race, leaving no residue whatsoever !

It is this Devi Lalita, Kama-Kamesvari, who alone can bestow both Bhukti and Mukti on all who remember Her by offering their every thought, word and deed at Her Throne. She is (symbolised as) seated on the left lap of Her Lord Kamesvara with a sweet smile ever playing on Her face, radiant like the Rising Sun and serene as the full moon, surrounded by nine tiers of the Sakti-Chakra and worshipped by all as the Supreme Mother and Queen, Raja Rajeswari!

AGASTHYA: " Who was this mighty Bhandasura, O Lord, and which was his city? How was he able to dry up the rasa of the three worlds and become invincible? How was the manifestation of Kamesvara and Kamesvari brought about? How did Kama-Kamesvari, Devi Lalita, destroy Bhandasura and rescue the three worlds? How is one enabled now to obtain both Mukti and Bhukti through Her Grace?"

HAYAGRIVA: " O Chief of Munis! You have asked so many questions that, to answer them all, I will have to narrate to you a very long story indeed! If you will have the patience, I shall relate it to you beginning with Daksha-Prajapathi's daughter Sati Devi and her Lord Maheswara, who were responsible for the birth and prowess of Bhandasura.

SATI DEVI VISITS DAKSHA YAGNA

The wearer of the Crescent Moon, Lord Shiva was seated on Kailas with his spouse Sati Devi, daughter of Daksha-Prajapati. They were surrounded by devotees like Nandi, Bhringi, Mahakala and Chiefs of the Rudra-Ganas, as also Sananda and other Yogindras. While they were all happily contented and in great peace, Lord Shiva was intent on pleasing his beloved spouse Sati Devi who, he felt, would soon be separated from him!

All of a sudden, Sati Devi was surprised to hear noises in the firmament. Looking up, she beheld vast retinues of devatas wending their way jubilantly in the direction of her father Daksha's abode. She hastily sent a Gana-Nayaka to find the cause of all this bustle and movement. In no time, the Gana-Nadha returned and, saluting her, said " O Mother! Thy father, the great Daksha Prajapati is beginning a Great Yajna; and these devas and devatas have all been invited to participate in it. In response to his invitation, they are all hastening thither accompanied by all their retinues and armies." Sati Devi was filled with joy at her father performing such a great Yajna involving the Rulers of the three worlds! So she said to her Lord in great haste: "O Lord! My father is performing a great Yajna at which all my relatives and family members are sure to be present. This will be a golden opportunity for me to meet them all and to visit my beloved mother too! My sisters and their children also will be there. Lord, let me go. After meeting them all, I shall return forthwith."

Lord Shiva smiled and spoke sweetly to his spouse who had been overcome by moha at the thought of seeing all her near and dear: "Devi, it is not good for you to visit your father's house now. I shall tell you why: It is my nature to grant the earnest desires of all my devotees. I even remove obstacles from their path and put an end to all their miseries. O beloved! Bound to Truth and Wisdom, I always act without any tinge of selfish interest. I do my duty as one of the overlords of the Worlds. There is no reason why I should work for my own gain; for what lack I ? No desire fascinates me. I am not attached to anything with moha. I am untouched by all, for I revel ever in Atma. Ever immersed in the Atmic Bliss, I move among my Bhaktas seeking their welfare. Once, the hosts of devas, full of devotion to me, came to pay their respects to me and, with them, was your father. While all the devas humbly joined their palms saluting me, your father did not do so, as I was his son-in-law. Yet, while receiving all the devas and enquiring after their welfare, I lovingly asked your father also, respecting him as a father-in-law; but desisted from saluting him - for I see naught in the three worlds that should be saluted by me. your father took umbrage at this omission and became very angry. Giving way to wrath and unable to control himself, he raged at me and reviled me to his heart's content. Then, with reddened face and blood shot eyes filled with hate and spite he left my presence abruptly and returned home. It was only then that I witnessed the baser side of his self which still seems to hold sway over him. He has, in consequence, vowed never more to see you or me, much less to invite us. He now intends to perform the Yajna without my presence and with such devatas as will, in their greed or fear, cooperate with him in spite of my absence. My advice to you is not to visit him now. Only evil shall befall this Yagna. If you still insist on going, you are at perfect liberty to do as you will, and I shall not restrain you. But you know my mind; and remember what I have just told you."

Hearing her Lord speak thus, Dakshayani replied: " O Lord of the Worlds! What thou hast just revealed to me makes me all the more eager to visit my father so that I may open his eyes to Thy greatness and majesty and save him from impending destruction. I shall reason and plead with him and win his heart back toThee and me. If he persists in his ignorance and will not desist from vile slander of Thee, then woe alone shall betide him. His obstinacy can only ruin his Yagna; it cannot affect Thee who art beyond all stain, and ever pure. I shall counsel him to treat Thee with respect and invite Thee to the Yajna with all due reverence. I see my father about to be hurled down the deep abyss of Moha and Krodha to his own undoing. It is my duty, as his daughter, to prevent his downfall and to save him before it be too late. He does not realise now the magnitude of Thy greatness or might. Thou art like a glowing ember hidden by a covering of ash. Thy outward appearance has hidden Thy real Self from his unperceiving eyes. I have tasted Thy magnificence; and it is up to me to make him realise it too. Hence I beseech Thee to graciously accept my prayer, O Lord, and grant me leave to proceed forthwith on my mission". Foreseeing the outcome of her hasty action Parameswara remained silently contemplative; but Sati Devi took his silence for acquiescence and prepared to leave for her father's home.

Beholding their holy Mother making preparations to leave, the following Chieftains and their retinue also made haste to accompany her: Mahakala, Mahakanta,

Gantakarna, Kapali, Kumbhodra, Nikumbha, Minagriva, Mrigantaka, Oordhakesa, Ketumali, Thandu, Makaralochana, Somaka, Nilabahu, Bhairava, Kalabhairava, Svachchandabhairava, Uchchasya, Udhritta, Visvaghasmara, Alarka, Simhaketu, Maniman, Manikandhara and other Chiefs of Pramadhagånas. They brought out the golden, gem-studded chariot which could move with the speed of wind. Seated on this celestial chariot, Sati Devi travelled through the firmament surrounded by singing apsaras, chanting-devaganas and siddhacharanas and all her beautiful and charming hand-maids - ready to minister unto her every need, and ever trying to amuse her.

The chariot passed over the clouds with tinkling bells, soaring above many snow-tipped peaks of the Himalayas. As she moved through the clouds and began to descend to earth, Sati Devi noticed many an ill-omen: The birds began to soar towards the disc of the sun, wailing for sheer inability to reach it; her right eye-lid began to quiver; the wind-god began to blow confusedly in all directions; smoke began to cover up and hide the beauty of the surrounding country, making it murky and obscure. Noticing these and other fore-bodings of evil, Sati Devi feared the consequences of her self-imposed mission. She soon arrived at her father's abode. There, she beheld the magnificent assembly of many-splendoured devas, rishis and other guests. She saw her mother's sister and all her near and dear relatives. Among the throng composed of Brahma, Vishnu, Indra, Dhikpalakas, Prajapatis, and Siddhas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas, she beheld Saraswathi, Sachidevi, Swahadevi and the spouses of other Dhikpalakas, as also many apsara damsels. She saw the many vessels and articles in readiness for the Yajna, with the assisting dwijas and ritwiks; she heard the chanting of mantras vibrating in all directions, filing the air with Swahakaras, Vaushatkaras and resounding with stotras and Anuvakas and recitals of Rig, Sama and other Vedic hymns and mantras. Deeply impressed by all these preparations, Sati Devi stepped into the busy enclosure, flanked on either side by her adoring and loving hand-maids.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER DISAGREE

Daksha Prajapati trembled with wrath at the sight of his once-beloved daughter. His face reddened with rage; and his hate for his son-in-law leaped to his eyes. With eyebrows knit in anger and eyes flashing fire he averted his face from his daughter Sati, while the assembled guests feared to look upon him - with fore-bodings of some impending disaster! Daksha beheld his other relatives with gentle and loving looks but, turning towards Sati-Devi, they were charged with consuming hatred and wrath. In the absence of his son-in-law his harsh abuse and invective was directed towards his innocent daughter who stood dumbfounded, and shut her ears at the unexpected innuendoes hurled at her, reproaching her Lord and husband. She had not expected her father to inveigh thus and put her to shame and humiliation before her beloved relatives and all that assembly of great ones. Her father had indeed called her husband names, and described him as an inauspicious-looking beggar smeared with ashes from the cremation ground clothed in tiger skin, with a begging bowl in his hand, with snakes for ornaments and surrounded by ghosts and gnomes! If he only knew what grandeur and majesty lay behind his outward appearance! He had also imputed ahangkara, pride and haughtiness to her Lord

who is ever peace, and calm personified! However, she feared now what her Lord's anger might accomplish if her father's blind wrath were to rouse his indignation! She turned to her Father and said: " O Father! Why this outburst against your daughter - your own flesh and blood? What has caused this great change in you that you rail thus at your once most-beloved child, and humiliate her in the presence of this great and magnificent assembly? What sin have I committed against you to merit all this unwarranted abuse? Am I not innocent and free from all guile and unfaithfulness? Is it not my great love and affection for you that has drawn me here to you in spite of you not having invited me or my husband?"

DAKSHA: "You are innocent; but your sin lies in having married that beggar who passed for a great Tapaswin and cheated you into loving him in spite of his most inauspicious appearance and retinue! Just as a clear crystal reflects the colour of the article with which it comes in contact, you are now tainted because of your husband. Nay, you have become foul because of him - as pure cow's milk is fouled by contact with a dog. You are not my daughter now but the wife of a Kapali - an Avadhuta - roaming in the Burning Ghats and smearing his body with ashes from the burnt corpses. Begone from my presence ere this Yajnasala also become fouled!"

SATI DEVI: "Nay father! speak not thus. My husband is ever auspicious! Appearances are deceptive. Though covered and bedecked as he is, there is none other in the three worlds more handsome or more auspicious or mightier than my husband! Why speak even of his presence in a place like this Yaga-Sala - his very name "Siva" is enough to purify the place and all therein. He is auspiciousness incarnate! The two syllables of his name are capable of liberating one from the wheel of Samsara, granting always more than one's desires. He is easily pleased. He harbours no ill-will; nor can anyone's ill-will affect him in the least. He is beyond the pairs of opposites, and ever serene. His absence from this Yaga-Sala renders it incomplete, bereft of its Lord and Sustainer. By his absence, your Yagna will remain unfulfilled from the very start. How can wood burn without fire? How can water flow without its fluidity? You do not realise what you stand to lose; for unreasonable wrath has clouded your mind. I know you will not pay heed to my words either. How can you expect to tend this mighty tree of Maha-Yajna while you cut down its very roots in blind anger? You are gambling now, bidding your entire wealth and fame and name, yourself and relations, your friends and dependents against mighty odds - the magnitude of which you are not able to gauge! May not your name and fame sink into obscurity, nor your greatness as a Prajapati remain forgotten! May you not be held responsible for the extinction of your entire race! Let not all these good Brahmanas reap the whirlwind because of your rash act! Father, rebuke not my husband who wears the three worlds in his body and protects all as his devotees. He ever revels in the Bliss of the Atma and is untouched by any vagaries of Mind. Call him now; and he will come , as though no difference had ever existed between you ere this; and your Yagna shall forthwith become complete and fruitful - without a doubt! The fire of his wisdom tolerates no impurity; and how can anyone's wrath taint him? He is like the Super-Ether unaffected and beyond all agitation. Even Maha-Rishis, who have realised the highest bliss, hold him in great reverence and prostrate before him. He is verily to be adored and worshipped by you, instead of

being made an enemy of, if you desire to prosper!" At these words, Daksha could contain his rage no longer.

DAKSHA: "Stop eulogies of my enemy and remove yourself from my presence instantly or you shall be further humiliated on account of your `LORD' !"

SATI DEVI ENDS HER LIFE

SATIDEVI closed her ears again at these harsh and heart-rending words from her father. With closed eyes she prayed for her father, knowing what evil fate awaited him! She could not think of going back to her Lord after what had transpired - especially as she had already been warned by him concerning the consequences of her infatuation; and she had come here against his will. Determined, therefore, to end her life then and there, she sat in Lotus-posture before all the congregation and made haste to kindle the Inner Fire of Yoga. She called her beloved attendant-damsels to her side and bade them convey the message of her casting off of her present body and passing on to take up another new body in the Himalayas. She told them that it was not her father alone who was responsible for this act of hers: She related to them how Himavan, the Lord of the Himalayas, had once performed austere tapas and how she had given him a boon that she would be born as his daughter. She would therefore be born to his spouse Menaka and grow up as Parvati to again marry her Lord Shiva, in due course. She added: "Salute my Lord again and again, on my behalf, and tell my husband that he was right in trying to dissuade me from my moha for my parents and relatives. Tell him that this body of mine is no more to be seen by him or any other; for it is of the same flesh and blood of the man who is now calling my Lord an inauspicious `beggar'. I shall burn this body, here and now, in the Fire of Yoga so that nothing may remain of it. As for you all, grieve not for me; for I shall soon be reborn as Himavan's daughter Parvati, and all of you shall join me there again, as my hand-maids." Having thus comforted her beloved attendants, Sati Devi half-closed her eyes and, kindling the Yoga - Fire from her Muladhara Chakra, she caused it to envelop her entire body in a flash. The body was consumed instantaneously as though it were more volatile than camphor! The blinding flash, like unto a thousand lightning-sparks in one, left not even a grain of ash behind. A mass of transcendent Light, bright as the Sun, rose up from that spot and disappeared into the sky above. The congregation, beholding this marvel of marvels, were struck dumb with wonder and fear!

THE BIRTH OF PARVATI

The Jyoti, that had left Sati Devi's body, now reached the Himalayas where the chief of the snow-capped mountains was gaily sporting with his wife Menaka, and entered her womb. No sooner had Menaka conceived, than her body glowed with a divine light; and her mind and heart filled with a rare bliss unimaginable. The Mother of the three worlds now assumed the form of an embryo in blessed Menaka's womb and began to grow day by day like unto the waxing moon. Menaka herself shone with a lustre indefinable; and her exquisite beauty was enhanced hour by hour.

Watching this divine aura around his wife and her ecstatic state of mind, Himavan was reminded of the boon he had once obtained from Ambika; and he was now

certain that the time for fulfilment of that boon was drawing nigh. He was transported with joy at the thought of the Mother of the Worlds being reborn as his own little daughter! He took great care of his wife; and protected her with tender love, and with blissful anticipation of the great event which would immortalise his name and his race!

At last arrived the auspicious day and moment; and Parvati was born when the moon and stars were strong with the aspect of a group of five auspicious planets, free from malefic influences; Nature thrilled with the joy of her incarnation; and many an auspicious sign appeared in the heavens acclaiming the glad event: The ten directions filled with surpassing peace; the populace of the worlds were filled with wondrous content and joy; the apsaras in the heavens danced in great glee and gaiety; celestial instruments of music blared, trumpeted and chimed to the tune of Gandharvas; the devatas showered fragrant flowers with their own hands.

Witnessing these signs, Himavan knew for certain that the little baby-girl in his arms was no other than the Mother of the Worlds; and the joy of the parents knew no bounds!

In due course, the baby was christened "PARVATI" - daughter of Parvata or Mountain; and she grew up playful and beloved of all the many damsels abiding in the neighbouring hills. The blithe baby was bright and beautiful, slender as the crescent moon. Not for long could her fond mother carry and caress the child, for hundreds of admiring damsels from all the neighbourhood took their turns with her; and the baby beloved of all, constantly changed from waist to waist like flashes of lightning appearing in different parts of the sky and never always in the same spot! The inner quarters of Himavan's Palace were always now crowded with women impatiently competing with one another for a glimpse of the beautiful baby. They longed to caress the child and to hold her close to their bosoms. This scene was akin to that of the sky with the crescent moon surrounded by innumerable stars.

Himavan loved to hold his little daughter on his right thigh, and listen to her lisping words with a bubbling heart. He longed to look at and admire her elongated eyes shaped like lotus petals; he peeped with awe, into the treasures of the deep depths of the dark pools of her smiling eyes - unable to believe his great fortune. He was fascinated by her little curls of hair dancing in the breeze and playing pranks on her smooth and shining forehead resembling the half-moon. The reflection, on the smooth and mirror-like cheeks, of the chubby little fingers reaching for her fruit-like rosy mouth held him spell-bound! Thus passed days and months and the baby grew up to be the most charmingly beautiful girl in all the world. The parents feasted their eyes watching her at play; and their hearts and minds were ever serene.as though bathed by showers of nectar. their ears were ever full ringing with the sweet words of their daughter. Her complexion competed with the sheen of the blue lotus, excelling in its beauty and brightness. Moving about here and there, she vied with the blue saphire gem in its twinkle and translucence. The scenic beauty of the hills and dales, of peaks and creeks, of rivers and lakes, of melting ice and water-falls, of pebbles and sand in rivulets, of plants and creepers and trees, of flowers and fruits, of bees and birds, became enhanced and blessed by her sweet presence amidst them.

PARVATI'S YOUTHFUL BEAUTY

As years piled upon years and the stream of time flowed on, Parvati's girlhood passed and, in its place, was left a dazzlingly beautiful maiden, exquisitely formed and delicately celestial - far surpassing Rati Devi herself. During all these years, the lovely damsels who had once been Sati Devi's near and dear attendants had also taken birth among the Himalayan hills and valleys and grown up as play-mates of Parvati. This bevy of beauties now surrounded Parvati and never left her alone even for a moment. The group resembled a cluster of variegated flowers with queen-lotus in the centre.

The enchanting beauty of Parvati was well nigh indescribable. Even celestial bards could not look upon her long enough to be able to describe any part of her wondrous body, for their eyes were too dazzled to absorb any detail. All they were able to do was to observe some flashes and dabs of red flitting about here and there as of delicate petals of roses or pink lotuses' for soon their vision would be obscured by the hand-maids surrounding her. The bards concluded that the top-most bit of red must belong to her lips. The middle ones to the tips of her fingers and palms and the bottom-most to her toes and soles of the feet. Though observation of details was difficult, the outlines of the body could scarcely be missed. The full breasts were all the more prominent due to the disappearing waist which again widened into the fuller hips and thighs. The trunk of neither the elephant nor the plantain tree could vie with her shapely and tapering thighs. Every movement of her limbs was a song - a paean exquisite! Every curve of her body, moving, created a corresponding ripple which thrilled through every phenomenon in Nature. When she took a step in walking, the tinkling gems in her anklets proclaimed her approach; and it seemed as though the Queen of Swans was moving with grace - not the terrestrial swan but the one sporting in the Mind or Manasa-Lake of the Yogin. The rosy rays emanating from the soles of her delicate feet and her tantalising toes would mingle in motion and weave a web of fabric which melted and vanished as fast as it was formed. Whenever she walked or lightly stepped on ice or in water, the reflection of her vermilion-tinted toe-nails and soles gave the impression of vermilion - fairies dancing around her feet. Her shapely calves, resembling an assembly of resplendent rays emerging from cupid's arrow - sheath, would cause the heart to miss a beat in realising its essential nature. The shape of her full fleshy thighs, widening upwards from the knees and abounding in curves, could not be hidden by her apparel, for the fine fabric followed the natural curves and displayed a gamut of supple forms unequalled in Nature. Her gem-studded waist-band of tinkling bells drew one's eyes to the full hips below it, reminding one of little shining emerald-mounds on her father's mountain. Above the waist-band were three firm folds of the skin - of the sheen of saphire - with fine golden hair springing up from her deep navel and rising like vines to reach her bountifully-full breasts prominent in spite of her apparel. It seemed that the rising vine had borne two heavy fruits; and the three folds were like waist-bands holding the slender waist firm and erect against the weight of the fruits-her breasts. The breasts were so high and full as to reach up to her arm-pits in surging curves. They resembled the crests on the head of a king-elephant in youth and vigour. Their shape was like unto abhisheka-vessels

of water brought for the anointing of Kamaraja at his installation. They seemed like a pair of Chakravaka birds sporting in the lake of the bright and blue complexion of her body. They were like a couple of Mandharagiri mountains, meant for churning the milky ocean in the mind of Shiva. They were like unto two golden kalasas decorating a prosperous home built of gold and inlaid with gems. They were so high that she could kiss them herself or even quaff the nectar from them.

The garland of flowers hanging from Parvati's shoulders seemed to smile at the golden chains of Cupid's swing. It vied with the early morning lotus-blooms in its freshness and spread rosy rays all around inviting Mahesvara, as it were, to take her in wedlock by exchanging his garland with hers. Parvati's rosy hands, bearing auspicious lines on the palms, shone with their natural sheen and, aided by the gem-studded rings on her fingers, again seemed to invite the hand of Shiva in wedlock by exchange of rings. Her neck was shaped like a beautiful and auspicious conch-shimmering and soft; her forehead of the shape of the half-moon was edged by eyebrows curved like thin lotus-petals, her nose was of the shape of the sessamum flower, her teeth were pearly, pure and attractive, her lips were smooth as new tendrils and red and full like the Bimba fruit; her talk dripped with honey, as it were, and filled the hearts of her hearers with joy and sunshine; her cheeks were smooth and shone like a mirror of gem-stone; curls of stray hair played on her forehead caressingly, while sweet scent was scattered by her flowing, wavy hair of jet-black sheen; Like unto a peacock's feather in variegated sheen, rhythm and symmetry, the different parts of her body exhibited the most exquisite and auspicious marks portrayed in the Shastras relating to physiognomy, palmistry, phrenology, complexion and auspiciousness itself, were all apparent in their highest charm on her person, enhancing her beauty and raising it even over the level of the celestials themselves!

DESTRUCTION OF DAKSHA - YAGNA

AGASTHYA : O Lord Hayagriva, the abode of all wisdom! Kindly relate to me what happened when Lord Shiva heard of the passing of his wife Sati Devi. Did he, in his wrath, punish Daksha for his wickedness or did he just bear it all in equanimity with an unruffled heart?

HAYAGRIVA : O Agasthya of great austerity! Listen, and I shall tell thee all: When the spouse of Shiva, Satidevi, consumed her body in the flame born of Yoga and rose up in the form of a Jyoti and vanished into the sky in the direction of the Himalayas, her devoted hand-maids and the many pramadhaganas and chiefs who had accompanied her to Daksha's place, left the Yagna-sala (place of sacrifice) in haste and returned to Kailash with the empty chariot of Sati Devi, but they had not the courage to break the terrible news to Sangkara. With grief-laden hearts and tears streaming down their cheeks, broken-hearted and unable to utter words through sob-choked throats these maidens stood before their Lord who, already divining the nature of the news, pressed them to speak out without any fear. With halting speech, their words interrupted by uncontrollable sobs, they managed to relate the entire sequence of what had taken place at Daksha's Yagna-sala, ending with the most unhappy but miraculous and wonderfully instantaneous incineration of Sati Devi's

exquisitely beautiful body which vanished in a flash of flame without leaving even a trace of ash behind.

Lord Shiva's heart heaved ominously at these words and his rising wrath knew no bounds; but in the same instant he controlled the welling-up wrath so as to save the three worlds from dire consequences. The soaring rage of Neelakantah (Shiva) thus kept within bounds was directed solely towards the destruction of Daksha and his race - to humble to the dust the haughty Daksha of abusive speech! His brows knit in anger and his lips trembled striking fear even in the hearts of those moving in the Akasa (sky); his body began to perspire with the bated breath, the sweat causing sparks of flame to rise, the hair on his head loosened and rose as their roots stiffened and bulged in anger and they flew about in the air in all directions as though seeking for the culprit Daksha; the snakes, that formed his ornaments, spread out their hoods and writhed in sheer impatience, looking for their prey Daksha; the blood that had rushed to his forehead, when he had knit his brows, also now invaded his wide-open eyes and transformed them into live embers of fire scorching all that came into line with them. Sensing this, the Pramadhaganas fled from him instantly and took refuge elsewhere. Although fearing the consequences of staying near his Lord, at such moments, Nandi Deva stood his ground for a while in hesitation; but soon, he also retreated unable to bear the scorching heat of his Lord's invincible fire of wrath. The earth soon began to vibrate with the great intensity of the heat; and the sun and the stars faded before the brilliance of Shiva's fierce flame of wrath, filling the three worlds with premonition of large-scale destruction.

BIRTH OF VEERABHADRA

Thus filled with rage in every cell of his body, Lord Shiva rubbed the flaming sweat from his forehead and matted-hair and struck the ground with it in one fierce movement of grim determination. As it touched the earth, it burst into a mighty flare and lo! there appeared on the spot a majestic form almost touching the firmament! It was no other than the great Veerabhadra Ganesvara whose very limbs were formed of Kalagni (the all-destructive flame of pralaya). His brows were knit and his hair, like so many flaming virulent snakes, flashed out streaks of blinding lightning. Duly prostrating himself before Lord Shiva, with eight parts of his prone body touching the earth in great humility and reverence, he addressed his creator and father thus " O Lord of Lords! Lord of all the three worlds! Command Thy servant. I shall accomplish whatever Thou biddest me to do. Through thy Grace, there is nothing impossible for me to accomplish. May I crush the trembling earth to fragments? May I drink the seven oceans dry? Or shall I swallow the three worlds? Order me but by a sign of thine eye-brows and I shall accomplish the impossible!" Lord Shiva listened to him with appreciation and said " Go, my son, to Daksha's place and destroy his Yajna (Sacrifice) mercilessly. He has insulted me and done me great harm; he is haughty with extreme egoism and blinded by his power. Go now and work destruction on his Yajna-sala also."

Thus directed, Veerabhadra prostrated before his father again, and taking leave, left Kailash and turned his face towards Daksha's abode. As he moved, every hair and every pore of his body produced a fierce monster with blood-shot eyes and a

large nose, ears, and a mouth with fearful teeth. Millions of them thus came into being and the very firmament seemed to be but one cluster of powerful arms holding millions of weapons of war.

These new Pramadhaganas set up a thunderous roar in the skies and seemed capable of drinking up the ether or scorching the entire earth. With this awe-inspiring host following him, Veerabhadra approached the Yagna-Sala of Daksha and gave them leave to surround and invade the place. As the ocean's deluge swallows up the fierce and roaring flames of Pralaya at the end of a Kalpa, so these millions of pramadhaganas swooped on the place from all sides. Startled out of their wits at this sudden onrush of death and destruction, and aghast at the fierce and awful form of Veerabhadra approaching like a mountain, some of the brahmanas and devas yelled out in panic and rushed pell-mell, trying to escape from sure death; some began to weep helplessly; some fainted then and there; some just stared awe-struck with open mouths; some could not move as their knees had become suddenly weak with fright; even the bravest of the devas considered Veerabhadra invincible and tried to disappear in all manner of ways: some turned themselves into harmless little birds and flew away; some turned into cats or took other forms and escaped slyly. There was none left to tend the Homa fire or to look after the sacrificial vessels and other materials; for even the rishis had fled in haste. Some cast their physical bodies away, as being an obstruction, and fled in their subtle bodies. All of them cursed Daksha for his false pride and foolishness which had brought on this unexpected doom from the wrathful Rudra-not on Daksha alone but on all that had wooed his company. Indra himself became a peacock and escaped in great fear. Even the Yajna-Purusha tried to flee in the shape of an animal, but he was too late, for Veerabhadra had spied him and was after him. Veerabhadra aimed an arrow at him and struck off his head so that the spouting blood flowed away and covered the floor of the Yagna-sala. This shrewd and quick act of Veerabhadra earned him the name of "KRATU-DHVAMSI" (the Destroyer of Sacrifice). After thus dealing with the Yajna as per Lord Shiva's directions, Veerabhadra entered the interior of the Yaga-Sala. There he saw, Aditya, the Sun, blazing forth in great effulgence on his chariot. Veerabhadra rushed up to him and, seizing him by the hair of his head, pulled Arka (Sun) to the ground and hit his head so hard that the latter broke his teeth and lay in a pool of blood. Leaving the bleeding and toothless Pusha (Sun) alone, Veerabhadra betook himself to the Moon, Chandrama, pulled him down to the earth as though he were a little baby-animal and stepped upon him so that he was all but squeezed out. With but a flicker of life in him - having become just a crescent of a moon - he begged saranu (protection) of Veerabhadra in such feeble tones that Veerabhadra let him go. (Lord Shiva also was pleased with the crescent Moon, for his humility and thenceforth wore him as an ornament on his head, becoming himself known thenceforward as Chadrachuda or Chandramoulisvara). Burning with anger still, Veerabhadra spied Saraswati Devi, who instantly let go her Veena in great fear. Nevertheless, he disfigured her nose and rushed up to the God of Fire. Catching hold of Agni Deva, he chopped off both his hands with his Khadga (sword) for these hands were the carriers of all sacrificial offerings to the devas.

BATTLE BETWEEN LORD VISHNU AND VEERABHADRA

Lord Vishnu could not tolerate Veerabhadra's treatment of Saraswati Devi and Agni Deva. He therefore got astride his Garuda, armed as he was with Conch, Discus and Bow and Arrows, and rushed out to give battle to Veerabhadra to the great joy of all the scared assembly of victims. He immediately rained powerful arrows at his foe from all directions. Angered all the more by this quite unexpected attack, Veerabhadra also climbed a chariot and retaliated by sending fiery arrows in the direction of Vishnu. Thus started, they went on exchanging many a mighty astra and sastra as though two wild and mad elephants were at war; and the three worlds trembled with their movements; their mutual shouts of anger and wrath raised a thunderous din that filled the directions with rolling echoes. Both used celestial weapons - one upon the other; but none of them was affected in the least though they struck awe into the hearts of the onlookers and shook the three worlds. Both were equally matched and both were adept and quick with their hands and weapons in offensive and defensive. Keenly watching the fierce duel and thinking that Veerabhadra might come out victorious, Brahma decided to become the charioteer of Veerabhadra. Taking charge of the chariot instantly, he steered it ever so skillfully that Veerabhadra, though angry at first , soon became reconciled and even appreciative on beholding the expert manner in which Brahma conducted the many intricate manoeuvres of the chariot. Continuing the duel, Veerabhadra showered multiple weapons of tremendous power at Vishnu who retaliated with equal might. Thus proceeded a long-drawn-out battle between the mighty son of Pinakini and Sarangapani, filling the three worlds with amazement; causing earth-quakes, typhoons, hurricanes, floods, gales and storms and outbreaks of fire. The firmament reverberated with dire thunder and lightning. At last, discovering that it was impossible to subdue Veerabhadra by any ordinary methods, Janardhana decided to take his life once and for all by using his invincible Discus-Sudrasana-feared in all the worlds for its efficacy. So, twirling it around his right index finger, he let loose the mighty Sudarsana and it roared into the intervening space with such tremendous momentum and acceleration that it flew cleaving the air with incandescent jets of flame spouting off tangentially from its thousand revolving teeth. Seeing Vishnu's Discus approaching him thus, Veerabhadra coolly opened his vast mouth and swallowed it at one gulp; and was none the worse for it.

Lord Vishnu was astonished at this miracle and was filled with admiration for Veerabhadra. Instantly he flew to his side in great ecstasy and praised his erstwhile opponent thus: " O Veerabhadra Mahavira! There is none to equal you here nor in the seven worlds! None can now stop you from punishing the wicked thougtless Daksha. You were born of the body of Shiva himself to punish these evildoers; and I see that none can oppose you nor come in your way. Who is there to stand equal to you in might and strength, when my invincible discus-which is capable of powdering a diamond-hard mountain - has not made a scratch on you! It has disappeared into your body now, and seems as though it had never existed! It is a wonder how you swallowed this all-destructive and upto-now invincible discus as though it were a ball of sweet! There is none to oppose you now. you may punish Daksha to your heart's content. Daksha, the enemy of Sankara, caused his own daughter to burn herself; and must certainly now meet his own doom. Rudra has sent you to chastise

and punish him. So do I also commend the deed. There is no real difference between Shiva and myself though people consider us differently. What difference is there between Energy and the Wielder of that Energy? Shiva's energy is in me and I am in him and there is no difference in either. Ishwara's Adya-shakti, which is one only, emanates in four different ways: Bhoga, Bhawani, Durga and Sangkari. While filled with wrath, she takes the form of Kali; when she desires a male form, she adopts my own Form. Hence I am Shakti personified as Male. As Shakti and Shiva are one, I am also Shiva. Shiva's order to you shall be my order also; and I bless you now, that you may punish Daksha without the least resistance from any quarter whatever. You may, if you like, eat Daksha the enemy of Shiva to your heart's content and depart in peace. I shall now proceed to the Himalayas and do penance to please Parameswara and regain my Discus Sudarshana". So saying, Lord Vishnu left Veerabhadra and went away sans his Discus. Then Veerabhadra looked at Brahma who had served as his skillful charioteer and, dismissing him with kind words, leapt into the interior of the Yagasala with blood-curdling yell of triumph. Many swooned away at the very sound of it. Those who had not, fell at his feet and begged for mercy; so much so that he left them all unhurt and turned to Daksha with furious mien. Chastising him again and again, he severed his head at one stroke of his dagger. Bewildered at this gory sight, Daksha's wives snatched wildly at their loosened and dishevelled hair and fell at his feet weeping and bewailing their lot. Brushing them aside, Veerabhadra threw the bleeding head of Daksha into the Yaga-Fire and fiercely ordered Agnideva to eat it up instantly. The startled Agnideva, whose two hands had already been severed, now feared that his head also would be detached from his body if he delayed obeying Veerabhadhra's command; and so with great alacrity , he pounced upon Daksha's severed head and made short work of it so that not a trace of it remained.

THE SUPPLICATION OF DAKSHA'S WIVES

The suddenly-widowed wives of Daksha were startled out of their wits; and they rallied round one another and, embracing each other, wept and bewailed their lot. With dishevelled hair, bereft of all their hundred-and-one ornaments and other auspicious marks of wedlock, and unable to speak for the choking sobs, not knowing how they could ever bear their sudden widowhood - yet still hoping against hope for a miraculous comeback of Daksha - they approached Veerabhadra with faltering steps and prayed to him thus, making his heart melt with mercy towards them: - "Oh Deva-deva! Jagat Chakra Maha Samhara Bhairava! Veerabhadra the merciful though invincible in wrath! Thou art verily Lord Shiva himself with power to free all! Thou destroyest the wicked and protectest thy devotees! Thy third eye is capable of consuming all the worlds! Yet art thou, Visvesa, capable of bringing them all back to life- Thou mayst reign over them again! Thou art Brahma, Vishnu and Niranjana, all three in one! By proclaiming enmity with great Lord Shiva, our haughty husband and proud Prajapati, has reaped what reward he had deserved. Thou hast well punished him O Lord. Why then this wrath, still? May this wrath that ever consumes all the worlds at the end of each Kalpa now subside, and mayst thou be appeased of thy great rage, for thy mission has now been accomplished as it should be! Just as thou art capable of burning the worlds and regenerating them anew, we beg of

thee to grant that we may not be left to continue in our widowhood thus. We cannot bear this, and we crave your indulgence to give us back our husband now that he is purified of his great sin at thy hands. Be mericful, O Lord, for nothing is impossible to thee! None else in all the three worlds can equal thee!"

Veerabhadra Ganeswara was moved with compassion at the sight of these wives of Daksha and, wishing to bring him back to life, he looked around. As nothing remained of Daksha's head he took the head of a he-goat and stuck it to Daksha's body, when lo! Daksha's soul re-entered it and Daksha lived again! Beholding this deed of compassion from their place in the firmament, the siddhas and other devas praised Veerabhadra in a thousand ways.

THE RE-GENERATED DAKSHA PRAISES VEERABHADRA

As though rising from sleep, Daksha sat up and, feeling his new head and realizing the situation, he fell at Veerabhadra's feet and praised him thus :

"Without conferring on Hara, my son-in-law, his rightful share as the Lord of Sacrifice, I commenced my great Yaga and I have now been well-punished by thee. How can the body be formed, if the right part were to reject the left? Daksha and Vama must both join together in the creative activity. I realise now that Shiva himself is the grantor of the fruit of Yajna! Salutations to thee O Veerabhadra! Again and again salutations to thee, namo-namaste! Mayst thou, out of thy unrivalled compassion, now protect me and my Yaga; now that I bear the head of Aja (unborn) I surrender myself unto thee heart and soul and crave thy protection. Puffed up with blind pride at being a great Prajapati and with sheer ignorance clouding my mind, I spoke ill of the Lord of the three worlds, Mahesa, and went to such lengths in slandering and abusing his name that my daughter Sati was forced to renounce her body! My sin is really unforgivable and life in Naraka (Hell-fire) alone befits me! Yet thou hast brought me back to life out of thy great mercy and given me a chance to retrace my steps back to righteousness and to revere Lord Shiva. This new goat's face of mine will serve as a good reminder to my erstwhile proud and haughty behaviour indeed! O Lord, I adore thee for thy power and might unequalled in all the worlds, O Thou abode of all auspicious qualities! How may'st one praise thee? I shall henceforth be thy devoted servant and shall ever worship thee as our benefactor, O Lord. Protect me and my Yaga, O Thou who art now my sole refuge!"

Pleased with the humiliation wrought on Daksha, Veerabhadra brought back to life the Yajna - Mriga - the Kratu animal that had been killed by his arrow earlier. Having thus given the repentant Daksha a chance to re-start his Yaga in the proper way, Veerabhadra departed to Kailash to have darshan of his father, Lord Shiva.

Thus has been related the great deeds of Veerabhadra. Whosoever readeth this with devotion shall be absolved from all sin. Freed from all stain, he shall inherit health and wealth and happiness with the blessings of Lord Shiva!

NARADA VISITS HIMAVANTA

AGASTHYA: O Hayanana! I am very fortunate in having heard from thee this stirring narration of great Veerabhadra's deeds. Now tell me, Lord, what transpired

in the Himalayas after Paravati came of marriageable age. Did Sangkara go and seek her hand in great eagerness because Satidevi was reborn as Parvati? Or, was he induced to do so by virtue of cupid's arrows? How did the wedding of Shiva and Uma take place? Kindly enlighten me, O Granter of Desires!

HAYAGRIVA: O Kumbhasambhava (Pot-born one)! I shall relate to thee that story, hearing which one shall be purified from all sins:

Beholding the wonderfully waxing beauty of his daughter so unexcelled in all the three worlds, Himavan fell into deep thought, sitting all alone at the top of a peak of the Himalayas. He began to cogitate and reason thus: "Here, in my race is now born the very incarnation of beauty - capable of ruling all the three worlds. She is the brightest gem in all my treasury. She is super-natural in appearance and movement. My race has been purified and magnified for all time, through her birth in it. Her youth is now fast approaching and I must find a suitable match for her; but I cannot decide who in the three worlds is to be her spouse! Neither Indra nor Yama can equal her. Nor can kubera or Brahma claim her. I wonder if even Vishnu could equal her! While he was thus in deep thought, there approached Devamuni Narada gracefully strumming at his Veena, Mahita, and singing praises of Lord Mahesvara. Happily surprised at this most opportune appearance of the Maharshi, Himavan ran to meet Narada with both his arms extended in welcome. The sage looked like the cool and joy-inspiring full-moon in the firmament, with his fair-complexioned body like a milky-white cloud, and the knotted hair shining like a streak of lightning amid the sound of divine music of Nada-Brahma proceeding from his Veena. His body purified by a bath in the crystal-clear and icy-cold waters of the sacred Ganges of the Himalayas, and his mind immersed in the joy of the Antaratma, the Sage Narada approached the Lord of the Mountains beaming with the joy of ecstasy. Himavan offered purified water and invited the Devarshi to an eminent seat.

After Himavanta had also sat down after paying due respects to Narada, the latter said: "O Himavanta! You are like Indra of the Devas. You are the greatest of all mountains on earth! I ever feel happy to think of your purity and greatness. The world stands steady because it is held in place by you, by Sesha, Kurma and the Dik-Nagas or Gajas. Hence all praise to you all: I have something very important to tell you, so please listen carefully: You are fortunate and blessed indeed in having the mother of the fourteen worlds as your own daughter. She is Ambika, She is Pushti, She is Dhatri, She is Luxmi. She has taken this sublime body in fulfillment of the boon given to you. She alone is Svadha, Svaha, Niti and Santhi, She is Atma-Vidya, Guhya Vidya, Papaghni, Papanasini, as She is the re-incarnation of Sati Devi, she shall become the bride of Lord Shiva; and She will adorn his left side as his ardhanari. As She has already attained to maidenhood, please take her to Kailash immediately. There, in Sthanvasrama, Sankara is performing severe tapas with great Vairagya. Victorious over his mind and his senses, he sits in Samadhi-Yoga undisturbed by the outer pleasures and distractions of the senses. Take your daughter to him and leave her there to attend to all his needs. and comforts; for she is ever contemplating him, and longs to serve him. Only gradually, through devoted service, will Uma be able, in due course, to win him again for her husband. The devas, who are being tortured by Tarakasura, are keen on this wedding taking place

as expeditiously as possible, for it is only their son Kumara who will be able to slay Tarakasura. They are even now looking for ways and means to bring about their Union. Hence, it is now your immediate duty to take your daughter Parvati and leave her in Lord Shiva's presence."

So saying, Narada took leave of Himavan and went his way playing on his Mahita (Veena) and singing praises of maheswara and Narayana. Himavanta accompanied Narada for a short distance in great respect and, returning, he conferred with his wife Menaka and betook himself to Sthanvasrama in company with his daughter Uma and her maids Jaya, Vijaya and Suseela.

HIMAVAN GOES TO STANVASRAMA Approaching Sthanvasrama along with his daughter and her maids, Himavan saw many crores of Pramadaganas protecting the area commencing from the foot of the Kailasa Peak. The approaches on all sides were teeming with beautiful trees bearing fragrant flowers or tempting fruits and nuts. The surrounding atmosphere was filled with peace and calm, and the scenic beauty was aesthetically marvellous. There was amity and natural friendliness among all types of animals roaming there; and the birds sang with freedom while parrots spoke the many names of Shiva as if in simulated Japa. Under every tree and arbour was a devotee of Lord Shiva deep in meditation with halfclosed eyes; and their bodies shone, besmeared with sacred Bhasma. By and by, they neared the top of Kailash where Shiva blue-throated, and fair and wearing the Chandra-Chuda, sat in deep Samadhi. No woman was to be seen anywhere around the area. Arriving, at last, at the ashrama of Sankara, Himavan detained Uma and her maids at the outer gate and went in. Reaching the outer door leading to the inner courtyard, he saw Nandisvara, the chief of Siva-bhaktas. With great respect, Himavan communicated his mission to him and sought his permission to approach Lord Shiva. Well pleased, Nandisvara went in and stood by his Lord with a view to commune with him inwardly. As Lord Shiva opened his eyes, he worshipped him with very great reverence and informed him that the Lord of the Himalayas was waiting in the outer court-yard desiring his audience. Being still in the midst of tapas, Mahesvara made a sign of assent with his eye-brows. Nandisvara went out immediately and sent Himavan into his Lord's presence. After prostrating himself before the Lord so that eight parts of his body touched the ground in humility he stood up and spoke thus in great reverence: "O Lord of the Fourteen Worlds! Thou art the abodé of all Light! The very thought of thy sacred Feet is sufficient to purify one from all sin. To have thy Darshan thus is the fruit of great austerity only. Without appealing to Thee and pleasing Thee, how can one's desires be fulfilled? Thy devotee is certain to have all his many desires granted; and more so. I have sought Thy holy presence with a personal request to Thee. Listen, O Lord, to my humble petition: My daughter Uma has no other desire than serving Thy Lotus Feet. She worships thee every moment in her heart. She now desires to be near Thee so as to attend to all Thy comforts in person. Kindly grant this boon to her. Be it a man or maiden whether intelligent or not, every one seeks liberation only through service of Thy holy Feet. Therefore, O Lord be merciful and allow my daughter Uma to have this opportunity of serving Thee. She will be no obstruction to Thy tapasya. On the contrary, she will attend to all that is necessary for its smooth continuance. She is

at the moment waiting near the outer gate with her handmaids awaiting Thy permission to enter and start on Thy service and worship. She will be Thy servant, to take care of all Ashram and household duties; she will gather flowers and make garlands of them; she will bring fresh water and purify it for use, she will carry out any other work at Thy behest. If it be Thy will, I shall fetch her in, along with her maids, and set them to Thy service."

Pleased with Himavan, Lord Shiva granted his request and permitted Parvathi and her maids to serve Him as they pleased.

With great joy, Himavan brought his daughter Uma and her handmaids inside and, setting them to their different tasks, returned to his home with a light and happy heart.

Parvati and her handmaids made themselves very helpful and almost indispensable. This labour of love ever culiminated in the crowning glory of the darshan of Lord Shiva in contemplation! Parvati would fetch fresh flowers and string them into garlands; she would clean and sprinkle the place of worship with sandal paste; she would fill vessels with purified water and place them near Lord Shiva for His use; she would prepare akshata (vermilion-cum-turmeric-smeared grains of rice) for worship; she would draw auspicious diagrams of varied designs with coloured powders or flour; she would fetch pure water for tarpana; she would collect from Mandakini many a lotus of golden hue and hand it gently to Mahesvara during Archana; she would collect Kusa-grass and samidhas (sticks selected for homa) and hand over to Shiva with great reverence while he performed the Homa. Thus passed day after day for Parvati in her Lord's service but never once did Mahesvara, lift up his eyes to hers; for He was ever in Nirvikalpa samadhi with half-shut eyes, His mind beyond the pairs of opposites, and His consciousness in blissful unity of Samadhi in the Adwaitic realm beyond all gunas. While Lord Shiva was thus lost to the world of duality and relativity, Tarakasura who could be subdued by Shiva's son alone and no other - was jubilant over the thought that Shiva would never leave his Samadhi state so as to be able to marry Parvati; much less to beget a child to slay him. He therefore became very bold and held sway over the three worlds. He drove away Indra and his devas from their Svarga Loka and assumed all their powers. Thus dethroned and divested of all their powers, Indra and the Lokapalas approached Brahma seeking his help.

DEVAS TELL BRAHMA OF TARAKA'S MISDEEDS

The devas saluted Brahma humbly and said:

"O Lord, you have created the worlds; and must you not also look after the welfare of all creatures? You are undisturbed in Satyaloka; but Tarakasura is playing havoc with us and torturing us because of the boon he had secured from you. There is none who can punish him. All the three worlds are suffering at his hands. As he belongs to the lineage of Hiranyakasipu, he is also as powerful and cruel as his ancestor. He has no principles; nor is there anyone whose advice he honours; his

pride is unsubduable; he has spoilt all Yajna-Karmas by making them bereft of Swadja and Swaha; he has caused great harm to Rishis and Munis alike; he has divested Svargaloka of Kalpadruma, of precious Chintamani and also Kamadhenu. At the very sound of his voice the devatas fled; and he took away all the gold and wealth from every home; he destroyed the Chandrasala and other beautiful mansions; the powers of the Sun, the Moon, Yama and other Dik-palas he has snatched away; he has carried away and imprisoned all our womenfolk; the fire of his might is thus scorching the three worlds and we are living in terror every moment of our lives. Forgotten are all our heavenly joys, laughs, dances, and amusements. Even food and wine we have no heart to partake as some of the devatas, unable to bear his tortures, fled from Svargaloka taking human forms and are now wandering in Bhuloka. Deva-pitru ceremonies have been forgotten. He can be subdued neither by Vishnu's discus nor by Shiva's trident. I have not related half our woes at his hands, O Deva! Have mercy on us and show us how he may be subdued. Thou khowest what boon thou hast given him and wherein lies the secret of his death; for die one must, sooner or later. Thou alone art our Saviour, O Lord, Be merciful towards us and instruct us as to what we can do to bring about his doom".

BRAHMA DIVULGES TARAKA'S SECRET OF LIFE O Ye devas! I shall certainly enlighten you as to how the asura lord Taraka may be vanquished. Listen with care! Even as a boy, though already mighty, Tarakasura started to propitiate me by tapas and soon enveloped the worlds threatening to scorch them and, already, a cloud of smoke shrouded them. To save these worlds, I appeared before the mighty Taraka and felt much pleased with his penance. Taraka prostrated before me and said: "Thou art the creator of all the worlds. Thou art the grantor of desires to all, O Padma-Sambhava (Lotus Born)! Thou dost grant siddhi to all tapasvins. If thou art satisfied with my penance, then grant thou that I may not be slain by any but the one born of Mahesvara's Veerya let into fire".

Having been well-pleased with his great penances, I granted him the boon. Hence, it is not fair that I should attempt to destroy one who has obtained a boon from me and who is prospering because of me. It is therefore upto you now to bring about the birth of a leader over your deva hosts, born from the Retas of Mahesvara let into the Fire. This is possible only if you can bring about the wedding of Lord Shiva with Parvati. Mahesvara is even now in Samadhi after the loss of his wife Sati Devi. By Narada's timely advice, Himavan has already left his daughter Parvati (who is no other than Sati-devi re-incarnated) with Mahadeva that she may look after all his needs and comforts. But never once has Shiva looked at her face; nor does his state of being in Samadhi allow us a chance to make him think of marrying again. Your foremost attempt therefore should be somehow with Cupid's help to bring about Mahesvara's wedding with Parvati. Then the rest of it will take place as a sequel to it. Parvati will be unable to hold Shiva's Veerya for the great heat generated and will let it fall to the earth. The latter will forthwith roll it into the fire. Thence it will pass to the care of the six Krittika sisters who will feed the six-faced baby for a while and drop him, in due course, into celestial waters of the Ganges. The latter will ultimately carry him to the Saravana (Garden of "SARA" blades). There, under the care and protection of Shiva, the child shall grow up with his six

faces. This Kumara, whom Shiva will make over to you as Commander-in-chief shall slay Taraka, of a certainty. Go ye, therefore, and instruct Manmadha (Cupid) to bring about the wedding of Shiva and Parvati immediately.

INDRA INVITES MADANA

Taking leave of Brahma. Indra retired with his devas to the devastated Svargaloka and soon bethought himself of Manmadha with intent to make him appear before him. The Thought-Form messenger projected by Indra found Manmadha revelling at the height of his power. He was armed with the bow of sweet-scented flowers, the bow-string of which was formed of the busy honey-bees, his five arrows consisted of five flowers (Aravinda, Asoka, Chinta, Navamallika and Nilotpala) each capable of rousing and enhancing desire and kama. The beauty of his form, enchantingly attractive was the quintessence of all types and kinds of beauty in the Universe condensed into one unit. He was chatting with his commander-in-chief, the cool full moon, capable of stirring the hearts of one and all, scattering maddening rays all around him as a living magnetic field of attraction. He was beholding the face of his dearest friend Vasanta (Lord of spring season) who was smiling in his varied modes of creation consisting of greenery, multi-coloured and sweet-scented flowers, fruits sufficient to melt and enchant the hardest hearts, he was exchanging witticisms with Peetamardhana, one of his lieutenants, capable of playing on the heart-strings of one and all. Damsels of the most exquisite beauty surrounded him and his wife RatiDevi with music and dance while others waited on them with wine and sweets and snacks; he was resting on his chariot (Malaya-Maruta) of cool wafting breeze carrying fragrance from flowers on the one hand and melodious music on the other.

When the powerful Thought-Form Message of Devendra impinged on his mental consciousness with its urgent call, Madana the master of illusions immediately betook himself to Indra's presence in svarga, his wife and retinue following. With a radiantly glowing body, proud of his mayavic abilities capable of fluttering the hearts of even Yogins and Tapasvins Kandarpa bowed in salutation to Indra.

At Madana's approach, the sweet scented and pollen-laden breezes wafted into Svarga exhileratingly; and the very atmosphere of the place became gay and alive filling every one's hearts with joy and longing. Madana respectfully sat on the seat pointed out by a sign of Indra's condescending brow. Realising the magnitude of the mission with which he was going to entrust him and wishing to please him and encourage him, Indra looked at his visitor with great favour, smiling appreciatively through his thousand eyes.

Finding the Lord of Svarga so well disposed towards him and sensing that his services were soon going to be in great demand, Kandarpa felt flattered and, swelling with pride, he said: "O Lord of the devas and ruler of the three worlds! Thy might is like unto that of Srinivasa capable of subduing all your enemies! I am fortunate indeed to be thus honoured today by thy kind favour. Is there anything that I can accomplish to please thee? Just command me; with thy good wishes, there would be nothing difficult for me to accomplish. Even the most impossible acts shall indeed become possible to me. In a trice, I shall bring moha and desire into the hearts of

great tapasvins filled with vairagya. If there be anyone trying, through tapomahima, to aspire to your throne, just let me know and I will blind them with Moha and subdue them with my invincible weapons. While I possess my magical bow and arrows and you your thunder, what is there to fear in the three worlds? If there be great Yogins on whom thy mighty weapon is ineffective, my arrows will accomplish thy desire. There is nothing in the three worlds that can make my arrows ineffective. Even if there be any one who eschews the very thought of woman and is immersed in deep contemplation or even samadhi, my arrows can break through the barrier of calm and create confusion in his mind so that he will run after the fair-sex seeking their company to the exclusion of all japa and tapas. If there be a danava who is even now preparing to invade Svargaloka, I shall make him forget his warlike preparation and turn his attention to his inner chambers where his damsels can so sway his passion as to completely subdue him to the extent that even their abuse would sound loving to him; and he shall, due to this love-play, forget his initial purpose of conquering thy Loka; and besides, wasting all his manly energy, he shall become a mere weakling and die. On the other hand, if thy mind is fixed on any particular woman, and she has rejected thy suit through pride, I shall forthwith change her mind and bring her running into your arms. Even if she be a pativrata who will not turn her mind to anyone other than her husband, I can win her for you if you want her, and she shall become thy slave by the power of my arrows. Tell me, O Lord Indra! What is thy desire? My arrows shall carry out thy slightest wish. Be he a human, a daitya or deva, Charana or Gandharva, who is there that can escape the effect of my arrows? Nay, not even Brahma, Vishnu or the Great Mahesvara himself who is ever in meditation merged. Please order me, and consider that thy desire is forthwith fulfilled."

Indra was well pleased at the readiness and enthusiasm of Kandarpa. He said to him: "O Manmadha! Vanquisher of the Three Worlds! There is none to oppose you. You are certainly capable of fulfilling our desires. Your action always safeguards our interest and helps the universe in its onward evolutionary progress. I am quite pleased with you and your valour. There is none to come to the rescue of all the devas today but you. We are in a great dilemma and need an able commander-in-chief to lead our armies against our enemy. Only the son born to Parvati and Paramesvara can fill that post and none else. Luckily, Parvati now dwells in the same place as Sankara at Sthanvasrama. Uma is ministering to his needs and comforts but Shiva has never paid any attention to her at all. After the passing away of Sati Devi at Daksha's Yagna, Mahesvara is ever in Samadhi and cares not to look upon women. Uma loves him dearly with all her heart and soul, and longs to wed him; for she is no other than Sati Devi herself reborn as Parvati. Your duty now, O Makaraketana, is to pierce through Shiva's samadhi and agitate his mind in favour of marrying Parvati. If you but succeed in this mission, you will have done very great favour to me as well as these devas, not to speak of the inabitants of the three worlds!"

Kama Deva was very much elated at this earnest request of Devendra, and so replied with great alacrity: "Thy command shall be obeyed immediately". Making his salutations to Devendra, he rose to depart on his mighty mission accompanied

by his wife and retinue. Feeling happy at his readiness and quite overcome with joy at the prospect, Indra embraced Madana to his heart and sent him away with his blessings.

RATI DEVI TRIES TO DISSUADE MADANA

On their way to Kailash, Rati Devi was filled with deep forebodings of disaster. The very thought of having committed themselves irrevocably to the task of interfering with Shiva's severe samadhi unnerved her. Struck with incomprehensible terror that shook her very faith in her Lord's capacity and power she trembled at the dire forebodings that assailed her mind as every moment took them nearer Kailash. Beseechingly she looked at her Lord and began to plead with him thus: "O Son of Vishnu! What hast thou done? Alas! how very thoughtlessly hast thou agreed to carry out this impossible mission! There is sure to be disaster in this attempt! Thy power is really too great for ordinary men; but alas! not enough, O Lord, to attack the mind of Mahesvara the Lord of Yogins! What comparison is there between Mahesa who holds the three worlds in his being at the time of Pralaya and you who are only capable of playing with the minds of men and women? Please pause a while and think of the great gulf that separates your respective strengths? If the moth can really eat up the flame of the lamp, if the mosquito can drink up poison and grow strong as though drunk with wine, if darkness can prevail and overcome the rays of the Sun, if a wild elephant can be capable of driving away a group of lions in the forest, then alone can I believe that you can match your strength against the will of the august Mahesa! Why have you so readily succumbed to the flattery of Indra? Are you greater than the Andhaka and Yama of great might and power? How are you stronger than Tripurantaka? The result of thy present mission will be no other than self-destruction. You have been blinded by the affection shown to you by Vasava into accepting this dangerous mission, which is like a cricket trying to invade fire! Those selfish devatas have flattered you into doing what they would never dream of even attempting. It is like asking a helpless visitor to destroy a poisonous snake, or bidding a stranger to wade into the depths of an unknown river. The devas do not stand to lose anything if you are destroyed in the course of your mission. It is only I who must suffer bereavement and pass my days in widowhood. Oh! what fate! What dire distress is awaiting me! Please forgive me for these harsh words; but I am unable to contain my sorrow at this juncture."

Although faltering with fear inwardly, Madana was displeased at Rati's forebodings of evil and at her disbelief in his ability and strength. To rouse up his own morale and to sustain his weakening spouse, he said: " O you wily woman! How can you speak so certainly of my failure? How is it impossible for me to vanquish the swallower of Kalahala? Don't you know that Dhurjati once swooned at the touch of my arrow? How did the Moon Chandrama make love to his Guru's wife Tara? Did not Krishna, as Gopala attract the Gopis? Did not Indra stain the name of Ahalya, Gautama's wife? How did king Dandaka get the Muni's daughter? Did not the Sun go round a badaba struck by my arrow? Did not Brahma run after his own daughter? How did Vali keep his brother's wife as his mistress? Who made Ravana steal Rama's

wife Sita? Countless are such instances of beings who have fallen prey to my arrows and forgotten all rules of conduct in winning women and courting woe. Why do you still have misgivings when you have already been a witness to all my victories? Not even in a dream can I ever fail! So saying, Manmadha caressed his wife gently and comforted her. Madana's best friend Vasantha also tried to add his word of advice, but Kama Deva would listen to none from him. He only asked him to get ready for the onslaught on Kailash which they were now approaching.

As they neared the foot of Kailash, Kandarpa was filled with pride and he took up his bow of flowers strung with busy bees and made a peculiar resonant sound by pulling at the bow-string -a sound that brought back memories of ecstatic conclusion of orgasm in the union of species - male and female. He then threw up his arms and shoulders and jingled his wrist-bands again and again as though in sheer challenge. Thus rousing himself to action, Kandarpa reached the Tapovana of Isana, preceded by his friend Vasantha.

SPRING SEASON INVADES STHANVASRAMA

Followed by Kandarpa, Vasantha entered sacred Sthanvasrama although it was not yet time for the spring season. With Vasantha's entrance, the entire landscape began to wake up and smile, as it were, and to unfold its beauty. The dried-up trees began to tingle with the flow of new sap and life. The ripened dried leaves were carried away by the light breezes and in their place began to appear richly green and varied coloured leaves in their fresh delicacy. As if by mere magic, there appeared fresh greenery, fragrant flowers and ripening fruits with bees buzzing around for honey. The hitherto parched and thirsty land now glistened green and wet, like due-bedecked carpets of grass. Every few yards, there appeared a cluster of colourful shrubs crowned with richly tinted flowers which shone in the snowy sunshine as miniature fairyrings. It seemed as though Sri Vana-Luxmi had suddenly bedecked herself in dazzling finery of exquisite hues and sprayed herself with exotic scents for her tryst with her beloved. There seemed to be a joy and a song in the very movements of these freshly blooming flowers. The tender and tiny breezes kissing the leaves and flowers of plants and trees sent a thrill through them so that they appeared to dance and sway to a mellow tune of love. The insects and birds, the butterflies and moths, the bees and wasps glowed in their multi-coloured garb and were literally drunk mad with the newly-formed honey for they fought and loved and frisked about, going crazy with glee. Brimming with joy and chirping and squeaking, the birds and squirrels flitted from tree to tree, tasting the great variety of ripening fruits. Little streams and rushing rivulets with miniature waterfalls danced their way through the enchanted landscape while silver and gold film of many a strange hue jumped and frolicked in the cool and crystal-clear waters. Nothing old or dilapidated seemed to exist anywhere. Youthful creatures were ubiquitous; and their frisky, frolicsome squeals and laughter filled the air. The enchanting flowery bowers and arbours teemed with singing and dancing lovers. Now rolling down slopes carpeted with soft green down, now climbing high on hanging roots and alighting on swinging branches, the monkey tribe played pranks and chattered without end. Nay, the whole place appeared as though it had been decorated by Nature herself in her many inscrutable ways for a gala festival of love! Amid all this fine

splendour of spring, the faint luring strains of Kinnara fairy damsels permeated the air and awakened the many tapasvins of the place from their meditations. Opening their eyes, they were thrilled by what they beheld before them. The fresh fragrance, the enchanted scenery, the alluring tunes and the feel of the cool breezes soon invaded their minds rousing kama and a queer longing for the embrace of the other sex. In spite of their long austerity, their senses now ruled supreme; and illusion swayed their minds, so that all they beheld assumed the form of fair maidens smiling and beckoning to them to approach. Even the pramadhaganas were affected and, forgetting their many duties, began to dance and sing and roam about the rejuvenated gardens. Their Chief Nandiswara, was at first stunned at their unruly behaviour. Then, noticing the enchantment of the surroundings, he suspected foul play by some enemy of Isana who must be intent on disturbing his Samadhi state. However, finding Lord Shiva still in tranquil silence and unaffected by the outer turmoil, he came out to meet the noisy pramadhaganas. With brows knitted in anger, eyes flashing red and nostrils dilated, he inhaled a deep, long breath and, quivering with wrath, let out a mighty, powerful Humkara which echoed and resounded through the entire Ashrama reverberating from hill to hill and filling the hearts of one and all with the dread of some impending doom! As if by a magic wand, the terrifying Humkara silenced the pramadaganas who became instantly sobered and ran back trembling to attend to their several duties; the munis and tapaswins shuddered at the sound and automatically closed their eyes and sprang back into meditational poses; the frisking and frolicking animals stood suddenly still and slyly began to retire to their lairs in fear; the singing birds stopped in the midst of a tune and flew back, in haste, to their nests. Even the leaves and branches of trees stopped moving for the breezes themselves had frozen with fear. Even Vasantha, the Lord of the Spring Season, closed his eyes for a moment in silent prayer!

KAMADEVA ENTERS STHANVASRAMA

While Sthanvasrama was thus veiled in a hushed silence of the stillness of death, Kama Deva and Rati Devi moved into the scene dazed and stunned. Picking up courage, however, they stealthily walked behind bushes and took shelter in an arbour of flowers, hidden by a Malati bush. As they did so, Madana's left eye quivered again and again betokening evil; Rati Devi's right eye flickered and trembled like a lotus flower struck by intermittent breeze. Unmindful of these forebodings of evil, Kandarpa was firmly set on his purpose and, looking for a vantage point, moved to a leafy Madhavi shrub on an eminence, fully covered with camouflaging flowers, whence he could, unobserved, have a good view of Mahesvara in Samadhi.

DESCRIPTION OF PARAMESVARA IN SAMADHI

From their vantage point behind the Madhavi shrub, Madana and his wife beheld Mahesvara seated still as a rock under a shady Nameru (ponna) tree. Clothed in a tiger's skin he shone with a celestial radiance like unto the dazzling summer sun in splendour.

Lord Shiva sat unconscious of his surroundings. Steady and deep as the waveless ocean and like unto a lamp in a windless place, his mind and senses had

forsaken their duties, for they were not turned outward; the nine gates of his body were shut and inward turned; no thoughts could evoke response in his Chitta for he was deep in Samadhi. Seated in steady Padmasana with hands resting at side, with two rows of Rudraksha beads around his blue neck and holy ashes besmeared on the body, while live snakes coiled around his Jata-Juta, neck, arms and wrists like so many ornaments, he sat invisible to people of impure minds and unimaginable by people of crooked ways; the vedas are in search of him for he is beyond the worlds though he bears all the worlds in himself. He was watching the multicoloured brilliant Jyoti within the sushumna Nadi, rising up to the colourless effulgence of Chin-matra and pervaded by ecstatic Peace unimaginable, unknowable and inscrutable; beyond the duality of creation and creator, united with the Paramatma, he looked as if he were drinking up the three worlds, drying up the skies and grinding his foes to powder; free from all dvandvas(pairs of opposites), immersed in the moon-like Jyoti of Brahma-Randhra above the Kalagni of Pralaya, he was one with the Parakasa; from his body and surroundings emanated tejas burning through the daylight, as it were, the entire universe bound up in his power; his Yogagni flared up in ever-soaring tongues of flame and nothing could go near him; all the creation of Vikriti from Prakriti emanated from him. Of all peaceful ones in the three worlds he was the most peaceful! of all the awe-inspiring, he was the most august; he was the most majestic of powerful ones; there was nothing for him to desire and act for, for all was in him. With his Atma merged in Paramatma, Lord Shiva appeared unaware of any extraneous surroundings for all was now his own self!

MADANA AND RATI TRANSFIXED AT SIGHT OF HARA

When Manmadha beheld Hara in this deep state of Samadhi, he quailed at the thought of disturbing him. He cursed himself for his erstwhile pride and for ever having agreed to Indra's proposal. He now realised his sheer impotency before the mighty Maheswara. He could scarce remain standing; for his entire frame trembled like an aspen leaf. His courage fled from him; his knees buckled under him, out of his unnerved hands fell his famed flowery bow and arrows to the ground; with a dazed mind, giddy with the problem of "what next"? he fainted where he stood and sank to the floor. His spouse Rati Devi, who had been already crushed under the weight of forebodings, now saw with a failing heart the humbled state of her erstwhile proud and haughty husband and wept helplessly. In her heart, she prayed that her husband may be saved from this dire calamity and hoped that this mighty Being before her would not annihilate her fool-hardy spouse! Even should her husband now desist from his attempt, she feared how they could ever escape from this dazzling presence unobserved and unpunished. Alternatively weeping and sighing, she dreaded the opening of Hara's third eye! Her shapely breasts, ornamented with tear-stained, glistening pearls, heaved again and again in despair. Fascinated by the dread in her own mind and by the inscrutable effulgence before her, she could not take her eyes off Shambu's face; and in that state she remained transfixed like a statue, bereft of all thought and movement. Soon, Madana regained his senses, but following his wife's bewildered gaze, he was also rendered sans chetana and chesta and became transfixed to the spot with a premonition of disaster befalling any least motion of his limbs!

PARVATI'S APPEARANCE BREAKS THE SPELL

While Kama Deva and Rati Devi were thus gazing in distress, helplessly, at the majesty of Mahesvara in Samadhi, the bewitching form of Parvati, entering the outer courtyard of the ashrama, crossed their line of vision. The sight of her, with her tender, vibrant beauty, youth and joy, broke the spell and brought back life, chetana and chesta into this distraught couple. A ray of fresh hope dawned in their hearts, simultaneously, dispelling the darkness of distress. With glittering, unbelieving eyes, they beheld Uma the charming daughter of Himavan bedecked in a spray of flowers from the freshly created bounty of Vasanta's magic. While Shiva's ornaments were serpents, hers were made of dainty flowers which gained the blessed proximity of her neck and hair, arms and wrists, waist and ankles. In her hands she held well-wrought garlands and a rosary of padmaksha beads. At this sight of Uma, Kama Deva's fear of Mahesa vanished and, with revived vigour and courage, he took hold of his bow determined to bring about the wedding of this most auspicious Jagan-mata with the mighty Shiva! Even Rati Devi shook off all her former fears and, with a heart and mind refreshed with the nectar of Uma's life-giving presence, bestirred herself to help her husband with his arrows-to quickly bring about the union of Uma with Shiva; A fresh spell had been cast on her by the wealth of Uma's beauty and charm - to which there really is no comparison; and the very sight of her, so filled her heart with ecstasy of Ananda, that she was now prepared to risk anything in order to help Parvati win her Beloved - come what may!

PARVATI APPROACHES SANKARA

Parvati and her handmaids halted at the outer door to the inner courtyard of the ashram where Nandisvara was keeping vigil. She approached Nandisvara with reverence and requested him thus: " O Chief of the Gana-Nayakas and trusted one of Mahesa! You know very well when your Master would be free from Samadhi. I desire his darshan now. I have collected the choicest seeds of the Bhagiradhi lotuses, dried them well in the sun, made very fine holes in them with a needle, counted out the exact number of these sacred beads as sanctioned by the Shastras, and strung them together into a Rosary for use by Isana. So please ascertain and obtain the Lord's permission and let me in along with my handmaids, that we may serve his pleasure and return as quickly as possible." Nandisvara requested Devi to wait a while and went into the inner courtyard to see if his Lord was still in Samadhi. As luck would have it, Shiva was then re-entering his Manas to be en-rapport with the external world of duality and relativity. He released the Vayus from the state of Kumbhaka to that of normal expiration and inspiration. His Kundalini Shakti returned from the Sahasrara, down through the Six Chakras, showering all the Lokas with the cooling nectar from the Moon-chakra, and finally reached Svadhisthana, coiling itself down to Muladhara making the terra-firma bear the weight of the seven worlds so that the Adi-Kurma and the Dik-Nagas could only uphold them with great effort. Seeing Shiva open his eyes, Nandisvara made obeisance and spoke to his great Lord thus: "My most noble Master! the daughter of Himavan is waiting at the gate with her handmaids seeking thy darshan. She has come with flower garlands for thy use. She has prepared with her own hands a rosary from the seeds of lotuses from the Bhagiradhi Ganga and awaits to offer it to thee". On receiving a sign of

assent from the brows of his Lord, Nandisvara allowed Parvati and her maids to enter. Leaving her maids at the inner gate, Uma entered the holy of holies and made salutations to Lord Shiva. Her approach was announced by the tinkling of the bells of the jewel-laden anklets and by the bewiching fragrance of the various flowers forming her simple ornaments. As she bent low and joined her hands in reverence and made an offering of the flower-garlands, the end of her saree slipped from her shoulder disclosing the wealth of her bosom. With a modest gesture she shyly put back the saree in place with a graceful movement of her lotus-like, delicately-rosy hands,and with smiling eyes,she shyly bent her head to one side.

KAMA DEVA MAKES HIS ATTEMPT

Closely observing Parvati and her love-inspired movements and glances, Manmadha decided that the opportune moment had arrived and that he should act immediately. He lifted his bow and, taking the arrow handed to him by his wife, poised it and pulled the bow string of honey-bees right up to his right ear. With his right eye fixed on Shiva's heart as target, widening his chest and bending on to his right knee he released the arrow!

RUDRA SMITTEN WITH LOVE

As the invisible arrow of Madana entered his heart, Shiva looked up into Parvati's smiling eyes and his heart throbbed with love for Uma, his hands which held and counted the beads of his Japa-mala now shook and sweated, so that the rosary slipped from between his fingers and dropped to the ground. Unable to speak for fullness of emotion, he could only smile through his eyes which made Uma's heart jump with joy. She thrilled from head to toe with ecstasy on the one hand and trembled with some premonition of fear on the other, the two mingling and causing confusion in her heart. When their eyes met for a moment, she again experienced nectarine joy overflowing her entire being and she thought her services and devotion had at last yielded the desired fruit. With shyness overtaking her, she bent her eyes down and, turning her head to one side again, stole a side-glance at her Lord. Joining her hands in worship, and feeling that he was watching her every movement, she made bold to give him the Padmaksha-mala which she had prepared at such great pains as an offering of love. Hara took the rosary of Lotus-seeds from Uma's hand appreciating it with his eyes; as their hands touched, an excruciating current passed through his body thrilling his every nerve. Shiva suddenly lifted his eyes to Uma's and finding her a very embodiment of love transfigured as it were, at his touch, he became aware that some extraneous power was responsible for this state of affairs. He instantly turned around seeking the cause of this sudden disturbance in his ever-serene heart.

KAMA - DAHANA

The sudden change in Hara's countenance and his searching eyes filled Rati Devi's heart with panic. When Rudra's eyes lighted on Madana hidden behind the Madhavi shrub, Kandarpa was in the act of fixing another arrow to his bow, unmindful of Rati's urgent warnings! The sight of it roused the anger of Rudra who knit his

brows in great wrath. Parvati also saw Rati and Manmadha and was alarmed at Shiva's anger. She silently moved aside and drew away from Rudra's presence into the outer court in great fear and trepidation. As Rudra's eyes reddened in anger against Kandarpa's intrusion and impertinent behaviour in venturing to disturb him, his third eye opened and lo! there shot out lightning-like flame of intense potency which, to the dread of all the devas and sky-dwellers who fled in terror, enveloped Kandarpa and burnt him to ashes in an instant. Uma trembled to witness the fate of Kamaraj and, overwhelmed with grief, she put her trembling hands to her frightened eyes. Rati Devi who had faitned at the sight of her Lord in flames, now rose to see only his ashes by her side. At the sight of the ash she fell into a swoon again.

Sankara, in the meanwhile, disappeared from Sthanvasrama along with Nandisvara and all his pramadhaganas.

Sthanvasrama area became desolate with Rudra gone and Vasanta humbled. The youthful garden again turned into dried-up jungle bereft of flowers and streamlets and greenery. Finding his daughter standing like a statue amid all this desolation and unable to think of her great disappointment - at the sudden anti-climax to her freshly budding hopes - Himavan approached her and, consoling her, said : " O daughter mine! Grieve not at what has happened. Desires which are great and worthwhile will always fructify in the end after encountering vast difficulties and obstructions. Vighnas will be many for any good attempt. We must learn to be patient and persevering. A heart which is softer than a flower can become harder than a diamond due to the nature of Time. The time for your wedding with Mahesa is not yet, perhaps! So come and pray to your Ista-devata and perform penance, if necessary, for the fulfilment of your desire in due course." So saying, Himavan took his daughter home along with her handmaids.

RATI DEVI'S LAMENTATIONS

Ratidevi, recovering from her swoon, beheld the now-desolate scene resembling a cemetery with the ashes of her Lord beside her; choking again and again she wept and called out to her Lord who had been the most handsome youth alive. She grew distraught with sorrow and wished again and again that her Lord had desisted because of all the many ill omens. She was angry with Indra for flattering her busband and inducing him to undertake this fatal mission. Vasantha, who had all the while been standing aside unable to control his own sorrow at what had befallen his friend, now approached Ratidevi and spoke very tenderly to her, trying to console her as best as he could, reminding her of Brahma's curse on Manmadha and its expiation resulting in their final reunion never to part again!

BRAHMA'S CURSE ON KANDARPA

AGASTHYA : O Mahatma, Hayanana, Why did Brahma have to curse Kandarpa? what was the curse and what the final expiation? Kindly enlighten me, O Lord!

HAYAGRIVA: O Chief of Munis! It happened during the Brahma-Kalpa in the Chakshushantara. There were two terrible danavas by name Sundha and

Upasundha. The two brothers loved each other and cooperated in all things without the least disagreement. Neither of them could bear to displease the other, and they were both strong and mighty in valour. The two of them performed austere tapas and obtained boons from Brahma. Filled with unsubduable pride and haughtiness over the prowess obtained as a result of the boons, they went forth and conquered the three worlds. They obstructed the Yagas and all religious functions and ceremonies. They spoiled and disturbed the tapas of Rishis and Munis; they dethroned Indra and his Dik-palas and usurped all their several powers. They entered the homes of the devas and devatas of Svargaloka and took captive all the womenfolk; they uprooted the Kalpa-trees and inflicted suffering on the suras. The devas, therefore, betook themselves to Brahmaloka to seek relief. As they approached Satyaloka, they heard the vibrant intonation of the vedas from all directions; they saw, seated on white swans, Savitri, Gayatri and Sarasvati - in attendance on Brahma who was also surrounded by the personified Vedas and the seven-crore Maha-Mantra Devatas. Beyond them were Munis armed with kamandalu and danda in Samadhi-Yoga. Entering the inner court of Satyaloka, the devas beheld the great lotus-seat of Brahma consisting of a thousand petals. On the full-blown lotus, glowing in the radiance of Bhaskara, sat Brahma with four smiling faces representing the essence of the four vedas. Around him were Yogis singing his praises in worship. On one side was the great White Swan, the Vahana of Brahma himself.

Approaching Brahma, the devas prostrated before him and sang his praises in worship. They then spoke to him thus regarding their woes: "O Lord! Is it fair for thee to sit thus quiet while Sundha and Upasundha are torturing us in all manner of ways? They have now destroyed Dharma from the three worlds; and Adharma holds sway all over. Unless the two danava brothers are destroyed, there will be no peace anywhere. Therefore, have mercy on us and save us from these two danavas."

Brahma said: " O Ye devas: Know I not how the danava brothers are torturing the three worlds as a result of the boon they have received from me? I fully realise your difficulties; and I shall certainly destroy them for their ill-deeds. There is but one way only; which you will understand if you know what boon they have secured from me. Desiring invincible powers, these two brothers performed austere tapas for many years. Pleased with their perseverance, I appeared before them. Humbly prostrating themselves before me, they said: "Oh thou Lotus-throned Lord! Grant that both of us may be invincible. Nothing in the three worlds should have any power over us, except the one over the other." Well pleased at their belief in each other's love and trust, I gave them the boon; and upto now there has been no difference of opinion between the two brothers; nor any one in the three worlds can harm them - neither Vishnu nor Rudra. The only ruse is to bring about differences between the brothers leading to their own destruction at the hand of each other. To this end, I shall create a damsel who shall be the sum total or parade of all the various aspects of beauty. Attracted by her great charm, each of the brothers shall have his passion roused to such a pitch that great repulsion shall manifest between the two, developing into a devouring wrath sufficient to destroy each other with their own hands." So saying, Brahma meditated for an instant and created the most delicately beautiful damsel ever, and named her Tilottama - second only to Mohini, with compelling eyes and lips and a full bosom, a narrow waist and bulging hips and

graceful limbs. The devas and all assembled there could not take their eyes off her. Even Brahma stared at her in deep admiration and appreciation of his own creation. She was a real beauty-parade containing in every curve of her body, expression and movement the very quintessence of the pretty and graceful substances of the three worlds. Kama Deva, who was also there, exulted in the exquisite figure before his eyes and looked around to see whom he could not subdue with his bow and arrows. The latter were always capable of creating passion even where ugliness dominated, for they were capable of making Adharma appear as Dharma and ugliness as the very embodiment of beauty by blinding the vision and reason and rousing passion. Madana mused that with the beautiful Tilottama as an ally to his weapons, he could make any one fall for her, not stopping to think whether she was a sister or a daughter. Looking around, he knew that it was child's play to influence anyone and every one present there - perhaps excluding Brahma alone, for he had himself created her and she was therefore his daughter. But that exception itself was a temptation for him to try his skill. He recollected how he had once before made Brahma fall in love with Bharati, his own creation. Unwilling to lose this golden opportunity by delay, he released an arrow, aiming it at Brahma's heart while he was still admiring his own creation with great pleasure. At the touch of Kandarpa's arrow, Brahma's heart gave a leap, and a desire to possess Tilottama possessed him. Losing discretion and all sense of proportion, his look of admiration and filial affection changed into one of passion and lust which grew in intensity from moment to moment. Tilottama perceived this sudden change, and sensing disaster, she changed herself into a deer and capered away at full speed. Blinded by passion and unwilling to lose her, Brahma also changed himself into a male deer and pursued her, matching his speed to hers. Immediately, however, Rudra became alerted, and he went after Brahma in the guise of a hunter armed with his pinaka(bow). Rudra's spouse Jagadamba also accompanied him in the guise of a huntress. The Vedas too followed the couple, assuming the shape of dogs. (This is a narrative of what took place during Chakshushantara of Maha Brahma Kalpa). As Rudra was at the point of aiming an arrow at Brahma, the latter perceived the danger he was in and recovering instantly from the effects of Kandarpa's arrows, fell at Rudra's feet seeking his pardon. As Rudra's arrow had already been poised and must be released on something or someone, Brahma now begged of him to aim his infallible arrow at Tripura. He pleaded that he had been blinded by Kandarpa's arrows. He felt miserable and was filled with remorse. Seeing Brahma thus penitent, and realising the part played by Vishnu's son Kandarpa, Lord Shiva allowed Brahma to depart in peace - after expostulating with him on the relative merits of Dharma and Adharma.

Feeling safe now, Tilottama regained her former form and approached her creator. Worshipping him reverently and in great humility, she said " Order me, O Lord, that I may now carry out the mission for which I had been created by thee."

Brahma then blessed her and gave her instructions as to how to bring about the destruction of the two Danavas Sundha and Upasundha. Tilottama immediately betook herself to the outskirts of the pleasure-garden of the two danava-brothers. She created for herself a most charming swing of gold bedecked with flowers; and swinging on it, she began to sing most enchantingly, displaying all the magical charms

of music to lure the brothers to her. Gently strumming her Veena, she sang so sweetly that the very air, the leaves and the flowers thrilled with pleasure and brought joy and desire to the hearts of even beasts and birds. Hearing this strange music, the guardians of the pleasure garden ran up to their masters and reported the matter; whereupon they embraced each other in a bond of loyalty and proceeded towards their garden. As they approached it, however, the enchanting music played havoc on their heart-strings, making them self-centred and foregetful of each other. They both quickened their paces as though drawn by an invisible magnet. As they simultaneously beheld the enthralling beauty of the singer, both of them fell in love with her and each desired to make her his own. So, dazzled and encouraged by her inviting smile and fragrant form, each of the brothers ran up to her to win her hand and keep the prize for himself. Kamadeva was not idle; for no sooner had the brothers come up close to Tilottama than he let fly his arrows on both of them simultaneously; and each was instantly blinded with passion and lust. On perceiving his younger brother rushing towards her with devouring eyes,Sundha shouted: "O brother Upasundha,look not upon her face. She shall be my queen. An elder brother is like unto a father and his wife is like a mother. I therefore bid you not to look upon her with such lustful eyes. Take your sinful eyes off her instantly". Upsundha immediately countered" O, my brother, I looked upon her first; and so, she shall be my wife. It is not fair for you to claim her as your own. Since as elder brother, you are like unto my father, my wife can only be your daughter-in-law. So look not on her with your lustful eyes."

Thus with such arguments, the wordy battle very soon developed into a wrestling bout; and then using their war clubs they destroyed each other. After thus accomplishing her task successfully, Tilottama returned to Lord Brahma and informed him of her successful mission. Well pleased, Brahma blessed her and made her one of the leading Apsaras in Svargaloka.

After Tilottama had been installed as an apsara of Devaloka, Brahma began to feel greatly distressed and humbled at the thought that he had so easily fallen a prey to Kandarpa's arrows. His sorrow soon turned into wrath against Madana for his audacity in thus causing many a great sage to err against Dharma. Pondering on the most effective means of punishing Manobhava, Lord Brahma decided that Lord Shiva alone could withstand Manobhava's wily arrows and be able to destroy him in the fire of his third-eye. Determining thus in his heart, Brahma sent out a thought-form beckoning Kandarpa to appear before him; and lo! Manmadha was there standing guiltily. Glaring at him in anger, Brahma cursed him thus: "Aho Duratman! blinded by your own prowess and taking mean advantage of a delicate situation, you dared to use your arrow against me, and made me err against Dharma! Soon, you shall try a similar trick on Mahesvara and be burnt to ashes, as a result. The wrathful flames from the third eye of Rudra shall destroy your body!"

Madana and Rati Devi trembled with fear and fell prostrate, weeping and begging for a release from the dire effects of the formidable curse. Brahma calmed down a little and said: "There is no escape for you from my curse. However, out of the ashes of your burnt body shall be born a mighty Asura by name Bhandasura who shall become the chief of the danavas and torture the three worlds as never before

and dry them up as leaves in autumn. Unable to bear his scourge, the devatas and we, Trimurtis, will perform a mighty Yajna for the appearance of Devi Lalita, who will rise from the homa flames as Sarva-Devata-swarupam. Devi Lalita will regenerate the worlds and destroy Bhandasura. After reducing Bhandasura's body to ashes, Devi Lalita will bring you back to life with fresh power over all the three worlds; and you will both be ever happy thereafter." With this assurance, Rati Devi and Madana prostrated again before Lord Brahma and departed in peace.

HAYAGRIVA continued: Thus, O Khumbhasambhava, was the manner in which Manmadha was cursed by Brahma. As there is no escape from a curse of any of the Trimurtis - Hari-Hara-Virinchi - Kandarpa was at last burnt to ashes by Rudra opening his third eye in wrath. I have thus related to you how and why Kandarpa met his fate. What more would you like to know from me .

BHANDASURA's BIRTH

AGASTHYA: O Wise one! Chief of Adepts in speech! Kindly relate unto me the birth of Bhandasura and his brothers in great detail, O Lord!

HAYAGRIVA: When every one had deserted Sthanvasrama after Kama-Dahana, the place was a veritable cemetery with the ashes of Kama Deva lying in a heap. Into this desolate scene there came Chitrakarma Ganeswara, a great sculptor. He walked upto Kandarpa's ashes and most skillfully fashioned a form-lean, lanky, and cadaverous matching with the surroundings - from the ashes of Kama Deva. By invoking the grace of Rudra, he breathed life into the figure and lo! it came alive. Thus, where Kama Deva had been burnt to ashes by the wrathful flame of Rudra's third-eye, there came into being the greatest of danavas by name Bhandasura as a result of the abundant grace of the same Rudra. His lean, lanky body was as hard as a diamond. By virtue of inherent power of the ashes of Kandarpa, out of which he had risen, he was master of Maya and could create or produce illusions at will. Thin and tall in stature, with a cadaverous body formed of skin and bone only, his fierce, burning eyes instilled fear in the onlookers; he had a large birth-mark on his face and was armed with a dagger capable of inflicting the tortures of Hell. Chitrakarma felt pleased with his handiwork. Embracing Bhandasura with affection, he taught him the Sata Rudriyam" and said lovingly: "Lord Shiva is easily pleased. Propitiate him using this powerful Mantra. He will certainly grant you all you ask for, because he is now, of a certainty, displeased with all the devas and devatas for setting up Kama Deva to rouse passions in his ever-serene heart".

Bhandasura accordingly performed tapas for a full hundred days, uttering Japa of the Sata-Rudriyam, with an undivided mind. Pleased with his persevering devotion Rudra appeared before him seated on his bull, Nandi, and bade him desire boons. Bhandasura worshipped Rudra with great humility and said "O Lord! If thou art well pleased with me, kindly grant that none in the three worlds should be able to take my life, that half of the energy of my foes be added unto mine and that their astras and sastras should have no effect what-so-ever on me." Lord Shiva granted him these three boons and, in addition, blessed him with un-challenged sovereignty over the three worlds for a period of six thousand years. Witnessing all this, Brahma

uttered the words "Bhanda! Bhanda!" meaning "welldone! Well done! It was because of this exclamation of Brahma that the Danava came to be known as "Bhandasura". Lord Shiva gave him also other celestial weapons of great prowess, and vanished.

By the power of Mantra, Bhandasura created two powerful brothers for himself from his two shoulders: From his right shoulder emanated "Visukra" of fiery eyes equal unto Sukracharya in genius and sagacity; from the left shoulder arose "Vishanga" the worldly wise, full of great energy. With these two brothers on either side of him, Bhandasura looked like Maha Moha conjoined with Sin and Greed. With the power of Mantra were born many more danavas with skinny bodies having deep-socketed eyes, hollow cheeks, prominent gullets crooked faces, with sharp long and fearful teeth, and with ups and downs all over. These many danavas collectively acquired and formed three thousand akshouhinis (each akshouhini consisting of 21,870 chariots, same number of elephants, 65,610 horses and 1,09,350 infantry). All the asuras, danavas and rakshasas joined together under the banner of Bhandasura and, building a large capital city in the name of Sunyaka-nagara, crowned him as their King and Ruler. At that moment jackals yelled in all directions; the sky turned grey and ashy in colour and rained blood; meteors began to strike the earth, creating earthquakes and causing fire and destruction all around. With these many fore-bodings of evil, the minds of devatas also became very dull and impure indeed.

Stationed in his Sunyaka-Nagar on the east coast near Mahendradri, with wide roads, and buildings enclosing a vast area protected by chariots, elephants, horses and infantry, Bhandasura reigned supreme while his foes never dared even to look upon him or his city. Thus established, Bhandasura created for himself a sister who was to bring forth very powerful nephews to support him. He also took for himself five queens to propagate his race; and their names are: Priya-darsini, Sammohini, Chitrangi, Kumudhini and Sundari. Bhandasura, together with his kith and kin and all his subjects, adored Lord Shiva and worshipped him daily morning, noon and night. Regular Yagas were performed for Lord Shiva in every home of Sunyaka-nagara; and this sadachara of theirs was a veritable shield guarding them and yielding them all the necessary strength and energy, so mush so that they waxed stronger and stronger day by day. They also studied the Vedas and the Shastras, held discussions and gleaned their secrets.

One day Bhandasura held a conference with his two brothers and spoke to them thus "O ye my brothers! Forget not that we have very powerful and cunning foes waiting to gain by our weaknesses. They are occupants of Svarga-Loka and have many powerful weapons at their disposal. Our first duty is to subdue them by sucking up the Rasa (fluids) in their bodies. Indra who rules the three worlds is still powerful and prosperous, but the times are now in our favour. Is not Kama Deva dead to the three worlds? Indra was ever using him against the danavas. Due to Madana's domination, passion and lust held sway over all the asuras. Before the devas can think of bringing Kandarpa back to life, let us dry up their life-juices so that their energies will ebb! I will enter Deva-Loka with one thousand akshouhinis and play havoc there; you, Visukra, take another thousand akshouhinis and carry out your mission on the face of this earth; and you, Vishanga, take the remaining

thousand akshouhinis and proceed to Rasatala and subdue the Nagas, Siddhas, Bali and other dwellers therein. Let us not go in our natural forms; for we should not be discovered. Let us assume invisible gaseous forms that we may easily enter their bodies and absorb all their vital fluids."

Having listened to this advice of Bhandasura, his two brothers expressed their great joy at the excellent proposal. Elated, and eagerly saluting their brother, they took leave of him and, collecting a thousand akshouhinis each, proceeded on their respective missions.

BHANDASURA INVADES SVARGALOKA

Like a veritable hurricane, Bhandasura and his one thousand akshouhinis surrounded Svargaloka from all directions. Invisible to the suras, they entered the bodies of all the living and began to drink up all the Rasa including their vital fluids. Gradually, the devas and devatas began to lose their vigour and strength. Their lips began to shrivel; the eyes became weak and lustreless; the full and plumpy cheeks became pale and hollowed and soon began to sag;the eyes sank into the sockets which dug in deeper day by day; their muscular bodies began to shrink until only skin and bone were visible; the limbs looked like so many eel-skins stuffed; charm and beauty became a thing of the past; laughter and smiles were heard no more; all the suras were transformed into mis-shapen, hideous figures moving about listlessly; gone was all vim and vitality; sex-attraction evaporated with the drying up of the vital fluid; the glow of youth was nowhere to be seen; everyone looked old and shrivelled up. The males were ashamed of being seen by the apsaras and so hid themselves within their homes. The apsaras, on the other hand, ceased bearing children too, and this barrenness reflected in the loss of all charm and allure. They had forgotten song and dance, and were incapable of responding to or arousing the sexual instinct. Unable to look upon their faded beauty themselves, they hid from the sight of all devas. As beauty vanished and ugliness reigned supreme in Svargaloka, there was weeping and wailing in every home; even wine gave no pleasant reaciton, for it vanished the moment it had been swallowed. The full and heaving bosoms of the Apsaras had now softened and sagged and hid from view; alas! Their full blown rosy cheeks became folded like an old woman's - sans smiles and colour. Thus, bereft of beauty, driven from all happiness and unable to bear any issue, the womenfolk of Devaloka wilted in their homes, filled with sorrow and dismay.

Even trees and plants and flowers and fruits were affected; they too began to dry up. First, the fruits dried up and fell; then the flowers and buds ceased, and finally even new sprouts stopped appearing; and gradually only dried sticks and stubble were left. The animals and birds began to miss their food while they themselves became incapable of reproduction and began to vanish one by one. No more were songs of birds to be heard anywhere; no colourful gardens or parks were extant as before.

Having thus cast his blight on Svargaloka, Bhandasura and his retinue waxed stronger than ever before and returned to Sunyakapura, well satisfied.

VISUKRA BLIGHTS THE EARTH

Visukra and his one thousand akshouhinis spread out all over the length and breadth of the earth and roamed at will in invisible forms. They possessed all human beings, entering their bodies through their respiratory organs. Once inside, they began to drink up all the fluids and juices including blood and vital secretions. As in the case of the devatas in Svargaloka, so also here on earth, the males and females became mere skinny skeletons - deformed, ugly and impotent. Unlike Svargaloka, however, the human beings had no alternative but to starve to death. For nothing would grow on the parched earth; and whatever was already in existence soon dried, wilted and vanished. Starvation and death stalked the face of the earth.

As time passed, the earth became one long expanse of desert and tundra. With the depletion of all Rasa, Bhoga-Luxmi fled from the world, accompanied by Bhagya-Luxmi, Dhanya-Luxmi, Veera-Luxmi and Santhana-Luxmi. As the Rulers in the world became enfeebled, Rajya-Luxmi also departed.

VISHANGA TORTURES RASATALA

Vishanga, veiled in invisible vesture, reduced his substantial body and those of his one thousand akshouhinis into finer matter capable of penetrating into the bowels of the earth, and entered Rasatala. There, they possessed the bodies of snakes and sucked up their poison which had no effect whatever on their disintegrated bodies. The poisonous fluids transformed themselves into vital life-supporting media for these asura demons whose digestive fluids were so many forms of fire capable of evaporating and absorbing all types of Rasa or liquids. Bereft of their virulent poisons and other fluids in the body, the serpents, great and small, shrivelled up into mere skinny skeletons. The great Bali's progeny-though themselves danavas, were not spared. The siddhas, who are famed for their psychic powers and renowned as great masters of medicine, could not withstand the baneful effects of Vishanga's retinue drying up all Rasa. They could not keep their bodies in good health for lack of Rasa, and could hardly survive. The other dwellers of Rasatala became peevish, through loss of health, and began quarelling and destroying one another with unreasonable greed or wrath.

RASA LEAVES LIFE

Thus Bhandasura and his two brothers wrought havoc in the three worlds by drinking up all Rasa which alone is responsible for Dharma, Artha and Kama; with the drying up of kama-rasa, departed virility and potency; with the disappearance of the vital fluids there was no glow, charm or glamour, no joy, song or dance or laughter. With the vanishing of Rasa, there vanished also dharma, purity, knowledge, buddhi, wisdom, mercy, affection, love, as also energy, effort, willpower, wealth and prosperity. Similarly in the case of animals, birds, insects and other creatures, and so also with trees and plants which no longer bore fruit - for their sap also had been dried up.

Verily, "Rasa" is another word for "Life" itself. Rasa is Brahma, Rasa is existence, Rasa is wisdom, Rasa is consciousness, Rasa is bliss and joy; and Rasa glows both in males and females; Rasa gives potency and develops all sexual and secondary tendencies; Rasa alone is Retas; Rasa is Prana indeed!

Bhandasura thus become a veritable creature of darkness by stemming the progress of evolution of life and spirit and of creation itself. The Moon could not shine in his fullness even during the bright half of the month; the stars twinkled but gloomily, looking hazy and clouded. Ignorance clouded all minds, while dire distress and dismal death reigned supreme!

It was while things were in such diabolical grip that Parvati, being indirectly responsible for Kama-dahana, and having been greatly disappointed in her love, cast off all her ornaments and began an austere tapas.

Rati Devi unable to bear separation from her Lord Kamaraj was preparing to commit suicide inspite of Vasantha's efforts at consoling her. A voice from the skies finally dissuaded her from the act by prophesying their re-union. Pending this re-union, Rati Devi also betook herself to Tapasya.

Even Vasantha was deeply affected; and he grieved very much at the passing of his friend and companion whose demise alone was responsible for the birth of Bhandasura and his kith who had now sucked up all Rasa from creation, leaving him shrivelled up, weak and helpless.

BRAHMA, INDRA AND OTHERS APPROACH VISHNU

AGASTHYA: Oh Asvanana! I have heard from thee about the birth of Bhandasura and his retinue, and the ghastly manner in which they drank up the Rasa from all the three worlds, disguised in invisible forms. I am eager to learn who subdued and destroyed Bhanda and his danavas, and how it was made possible in spite of Rudra's boons.

HAYAGRIVA: Bhanda's victims in the three worlds got together with a view to discover a method for bringing about the downfall of Bhanda with his kith and kin. Brahma, Indra and his Dikpalas, Manu, Prahlada, Charana-Siddha Guhyakas and others unanimously came to the conclusion that they should all go in a body to Lord Vishnu, reclining on the limitless ocean of milk and surrender themselves to his will. So they all proceeded as one man, and reached the abode of Vishnu. There, they found the Lord of Vaikunta also sad at the demise of his son Madana, and the consequent separation from his spouse Luxmi, on that account. Although reclining in a lethargic state on his Sesha-talpa, Lord Vishnu cheerfully welcomed the visitors. Divining their purpose, he was moved with pity at their pale complexions, lack-lustre looks and listless movements. Deeply concerned at their evil fate, which had not made an exception of him either, he said to them: "All of you are welcome! Are you well? Alas! your faces are faded; your complexion lacks lustre; your eyes are filled with tears; your bodies are weak and emaciated. Alas! the very sight of you fills me with concern. All happiness and joy had their abode in you. Where do they dwell now? Strength and Energy issued forth from you only. How have they forsaken you

now? Power and plenty had always been your birth-right; and how they have vanished from their very source! Where has the effulgence of the devatas gone? Where is their might and magnificence? It is this Bhandasura alone who has been responsible for your present state. Alas! he is most powerful because of the boons he had obtained from Shiva. Even now, he and his subjects are very loyal and faithful to Shiva in daily worship; and this adds to his strength, making him invincible. He has also absorbed the energy, vitality and virility of every one of you. Lo! the Deva of Fire who tried to be so resplendent before - how dark and shrunk he looks now, alas! The fierce-looking Lord of Time and Dharma, Yama, who used to make the worlds tremble at his approach, now holds his sword and noose in such feeble hands that the weapons themselves appear as symbols of Peace rather than those of Chastisement. The same fate has overtaken the Yashti of Yaksharaja. Alas! What can I say of Bhandasura's might that has reduced all these great and mighty beings to this pitiable plight! Why should I speak of others only? Look at me! He has caused estrangement even between me and Luxmi. Not sparing even animals, birds and trees, Bhanda now reigns supreme in all the three worlds - the sole Lord and Sovereign indeed! Although we are responsible for the creation, maintenance and destruction of all that exists within this solar-system, we too could not escape from Bhanda's blight. Because of the boons received from Shiva, no one within this solar-system can oppose Bhandasura; and he has very effectively subdued them indeed! But there is still one hope for us, because there is Maha-Sambhu who exists beyond this globe and dwells outside this "space" of ours. His mighty all-enveloping body is of a true chid-svarupa - of the Essense of Pure consciousness - and is untouchable by Bhandasura. He alone can devise the mode of vanquishing our powerful enemy. Let us appeal to him and pray for help. There is no other way left for us". So saying, Lord Vishnu escorted them to the edge of our space - to the outer limits of our solar system; but were unable to proceed further. The "spaceless" area beyond the edge of Bhutakasa was too dense and heavy to be penetrated even by the strongest living-being. Yet, gathering together the Dik-Gajas it took a hundred years for their concentrated effort to form a sort of tunnel through spacelessness. This they entered and were soon in the presence of the "negation of matter" finer than their Tanmatras. There dwelt only the solidified consciousness of the Purusha who is Sat-Chid-Ananda. Rising beyond normal consciousness of the Antah-Karanas which are inactive in the spaceless, formless and unthinkable state of Maha-Sambhu, Vishnu and others began to pray to him for grace and mercy, thus:

MAHA - SAMBHU STOTRA

We pray to Maha Sambhu who is Alone, who is purity and peace itself, above Maya and Illusion, unborn and majestic without beginning, middle or end, beyond all qualities, formless!

We pray to Him who cannot be known by the devas, who cannot be imagined by Yogis, who can be only indicated by the vedas as "Not this" "Not this"!

We pray to the Great One who is 'Sat' and "Asat" in one, dvaita and advaita in one, who is all self-effulgence!

We pray to Him who is self-born, self-existent, self-knowing, Lord Alone, untouched by anything beside Himself, Alone all-one and All!

We worship Thee who art knowledge, the knower and the object of the knowledge-all in one; detached from all and yet the cause of all, self-shining!

We pray to Thee Oh mighty Lord Isana! Who art beyond Dharma and Adharma or their unity, who is beyond joy and sorrow and all pairs of opposites!

We pray to Him who is the Sun of all the Suns put together, who is Para-Brahma the cause and stay and merger of all that exists, who is of the Form of Solidified wisdom or Jnana!

We humbly pray to Thee who re-manifested as Isvara with Form and qualities to thy great dvaita-devotees in the world and yet art like the formless momentary lightning to those who seek thee as Jyoti in Thy Formless State!

We pray to Thee who art as the negation of Matter and Spirit to the Madhyamikas, as Purusha to Sankhyas and as soundless sound to Patanjalis!

We pray to Him who is Viswakarma to all the workmen, who is as Shiva to Shaivas and as Vishnu united with Yoga-Maya to Pancharatras and Vaishnavas! We pray with devotion to Him who is Arthesvara or Lord of all Wealth to seekers after wealth through Vaidik Kratu; who is Kamesa to the followers of Manusutra and Vaisvanara of all physicians!

We pray to Him who is of a merciful Form full of grace and kindness to those who are merciful themselves and worhsip Thee in that peaceful aspect; who exhibits a cruel and fierce aspect to those who invoke Thee thus through their own cruelty and harshness, matching Thyself to their own deeds.

We pray to Thee who is as Fire to the Vipras, who dwells in the hearts of Yogis and who is as an idol or image to the ignorant.

We pray to Him who is the beginning and cause for all creatures but Himself beginningless, who is the end of all existing things though Himself endless!

O Lord of all! we cannot see Thee in Thy present Formless Omnipresence; nor can we imagine Thee in any possible Form or Quality! Mayst Thou become visible to our eyes in some one Form that we may place our grievances before Thee and find a solution to the distress that is now devouring our very lives from moment to moment! Never in the annals of the three worlds was such a blight experienced. The cruel, mighty Bhandasura has drunk up our vital fluids and left us impotent, impure and weak, incapable of any action. We beseech Thee to show Thyself to us and to speak to us and show us a way to save ourselves from this Bhandasura and his hosts. We are all Thy servants and devoted to Thee, O Lord! Become visible to our eyes and save us from our enemy who is ever so invincible. Nobody within that Globe can stand against him, for he has power over all. We pin our faith on Thee and Thou alone can't show us the way - if there be one. Forsake not thy humble devotees, for we feel already lost! Lord, appear before us and save us from this dilemma!

When Vishnu and others had thus prayed to the Holy of Holies, the Great one appeared before them, in company with Parasakti, as a mass of Jyoti churning itself into a particular shape vibrant with mighty energy! The assembled Devas were thrilled at the appearance of the Divine Pair. The Lord Maha Sambhu manifested himself with three eyes on a smiling face, holding a huge skull and a mighty trident in his two hands, while Parasakti had a brilliant, scintillating Form raying out vibrant Energy all around- bright as a million suns but cool and comforting as the moon - light from a thousand full-moons - holding in Her hands a book and a rosary and looking on all with merciful eyes!

THE MEANS FOR BHANDASURA'S END

With merciful eyes and a smile that filled Vishnu and others with hope and cheer, Maha Sambhu spoke thus: "O Children! Be not disheartened! You will soon be free from all this suffering! I shall tell you as to what should be done. Bhandasura is now all powerful within the three worlds; and with his great might he is able to torture all without an exception. There is a Kama-Pralaya now raging; and I shall tell you how it may be ended. Listen well:

"There are three kinds of Pralaya which overtake every globe in every kalpa. The first is Maha-Pralaya. Then there is Kama-Pralaya; and finally Avantara Pralaya. There are three Devas who will make the Worlds re-emerge afresh after each of these three varieties of Pralaya. I regenerate the worlds after Maha Pralaya; from the third or Avantara-Pralaya Brahma raises it again; but from Kama-Pralaya Lalita-Paramesvari alone can create fresh worlds. This recurs again and again in the course of evolution, in every globe and in every Kalpa. There is no escape from it, as it is all part of the great Plan for the uplift of one and all. This present Kama-Pralaya has been caused by an act of Shiva who is of my Amsa. With the fire of his third-eye he destroyed Kamaraj out of whose ashes was born Bhandasura capable of bringing about Kama-Pralaya, as you have yourselves witnessed now. Devi Lalita must therefore be propitiated by you so that She may regenerate the three worlds afresh and bring back to life Kama Deva, after destroying Bhandasura and his hosts".

Vishnu and others prostrated themselves before Maha-Sambhu and said: "O Lord! kindly enlighten us as to what we should do to bring about the birth of Sri Devi Lalita Paramesvari. Where and how would She be born? Thou knowest all, O Lord! Kindly instruct us accordingly." Maha Sambhu replied again saying "Listen carefully: You shall all perform a Maha-Yaga culminating in the sacrifice of all your bodies. I shall be present there as Hota, invisible in the form of all-pervading vayu. My chid-vahni (fire of super-consciousness) of which the terrestrial fire is gross and material, shall dry up the seven oceans and prepare their depths as the Homa-Kunda. The six sagaras shall be the abhigara (ghee) poured into the Homa- fire brought about by the five varieties of creatures which shall form the Yajna-Pasu.

The five-types of births are the mind- born, womb-born, egg-born,seed-born and sweat-born. When these five types of life shall be offered into the Homa as sacrifice, the material fire fed by this sacrifice shall rise up roaring to mingle with the descending fire or Jyoti of my Chid-Vahni, forming Jvala-Chidjvala.

Thus, you would all have merged your chit in Me and there would be no matter left; for, the entire Homa-kunda would have become one mass of Chidagni. Then, shall appear, from the Chidagni Kunda, the mighty nine-tiered Sri Chakra Chariot bearing Sri Lalita Paramesvari, with a Form like unto a crore of Suns and a parade of beauty as never before created or thought of in this kalpa - Sri Devi Maha Tripura Sundari Rajarajesvari Herself. Then, desirous of creating everything anew, She shall, out of Her own self, cause to appear Her counterpart, Kamesvara - the PARA BRAHMA dividing Himself into female and male. With mutual cooperation, this blissful pair will once again recreate the five varieties of creatures with new and fresh vigour of life. Sri Devi Lalita will create for Her use four most mighty weapons like unto those in Her Lord Kamesvara's hands: A sugar-cane Bow shall be the first, and the second a set of five flowery Arrows (like those of Manmadha); the third a Noose (Pasa); and the fourth a Goad (Angkusa). She will undoubtedly cause the destruction of Bhandasura and bring back to life Kama-Deva by Her very look. Your bodies, lost in the shape of Havya in Chidagni, will once more appear rejuvenated, and with greater effulgence than before. If you are all willing to carry out this maha-Yaga with self-sacrifice, I will cooperate with you. Otherwise, there is no other way to save you all from Bhandasura; and you will all perish, with ignoble death overtaking one and all. And with your death, the three worlds will cease to exist. My advice is, therefore, for you to attempt this great self-sacrifice to save yourselves and the three worlds from extinction."

Hearing this, the devas prostrated before Maha Sambhunadha over and over again, and in great humility replied: "O Lord, we shall doubtless follow Thy instructions and gladly sacrifice our bodies in the Homa-fire. There is nothing we shall desire more than that. Kindly be mercuful, therefore, and become the Hota for this Maha-Yaga. We shall indeed carry out everything as per thy instructions!"

After having assured the devas of his co-operation, Maha-Sambhu and Para-Shakti disappeared from their midst. The devas then returned from "Non-Space" back to "Spatial Universe";and entering their solar-system through the tunnel they had made earlier, they closed it up again by placing huge mountains at its mouth. The devas then returned to their respective homes, greatly heartened, and awaited for a sign from Maha Sambhu for the commencement of the Maha-Yaga.

MAHA-YAGA VIDHANA

AGASTHYA: O Great Lord Hayagriva! How was this wonderful Maha-Yaga performed? What result came of it for the welfare of the three worlds? Kindly describe in detail that I may understand every step of the mighty Yajna and benefit from the knowledge. I am deeply interested, O Lord!

HAYAGRIVA: Oh Great Muni! Listen intently. He who hears or reads the description of this Maha-Yaga shall be freed from all evil. He who listens to it even once, with faith and great devotion, shall become instantly purified. What may then be said of the one who reads it several times, but that he partakes of the great Brahmamrita itself! He who listens to it continuously for one week, with devotion, shall doubtless receive the reward of a thousand Rajasuya-Yagas.

Shri Maha Sambhunadha, acting as Hota with His Para-Sakti as Yajna-Patni began to perform Japa of Lalita-Vidya in His Atma-Samvith and assumed a mighty seven-fold form. Accompanied by his Para-Sakthi, and becoming invisible, He entered the material Bhuta-Akasa of our solar-system. As they approached the three-worlds, the latter shook and vibrated violently at the terrific whirl-wind-like movements of the vayu-rupa-divine pair. Alerted by this mighty vibration,and realising that the time for Maha-Yajna had arrived, all the devas hastened and waited in excited expectation, watching the wondrous visible deeds of the invisible Maha-Sambhu. The Great Lord, with his Sambhavagni Fire, dried up the seven oceans and formed a Homa Kunda reaching deep into patala, occupying an incredibly vast area. With super-natural power, the invisible Lord shaped the Homa-Kunda. Then, dividing all the seed-born plants and trees into four equal parts, Sri Sambhunadha placed one of the four parts in the Homa-Kunda muttering the mighty Simhasana Vidya. He then uttered the mighty Humkara whereupon his Vayu Body dilated and his Chidagni burst into flames. With his flaming third-eye, he directed the Chidagni onto the timber gathered in the Homa-Kunda; and Lo! the entire contents burst into flames. When thus the Homa-Kunda which had been purified by Japa of Sad-Vidya and contact with Sambhunadha's Chidagni, was duly pervaded by the flames of burning timber, worship was commenced with flowers formed of falling-meteors. Then, Archana was performed in due order, first to the <u>eight</u> Lords of Yajna and then to the <u>six</u> Lords of Agni or Fire - in the middle of which three other Murtis were worshipped. The Yajna-murtis are: Jataveda, Saptajihva, Visvedeva, Deva-Mukha, Havyavaha, Asrodara, Vaisvanara and Kaumarateja. The six murtis of Fire are : Sahasrarchi, Swastipurna, Uthistapurusha, Dhuma-Vyapi, Saptajihva and Dhanurdhara. The Trimurtis above mentioned are: Vaisvanara, Uthistapurusha and Chitpingala. Para-Sankara then worshipped the seven tongues of flame of Samvid-agni in seven different ways: Hiranya, Kanaka, Rakta, Krishna, Suprabha, Atirakta and Bahurupa. Taking hold of the clouds as mighty ladles, Maha-Sambhu poured the first of the seven oceans, like unto ghee, into the homa-fire. Fanned by the Vayu-Rupa Maha Sambhu, the flames drank up the crores of streams pouring in, and rose up a hundred yojanas in height. Taking hold of a second quarter of the trees, Para-Hara fed them to the hungry flames and poured the second of the oceans like unto ghee; when the flames roared upto a height of two hundred yojanas. When Para-Sambhu threw in the third quarter of the trees and poured the ocean of sugar-water into the flames, they drank it all up voraciously and began to dance to a height of three hundred yojanas. Maha-Sambhu then got hold of the middle ocean in a huge ladle and poured it into the dancing flames, when lo! they reached four hundred yojanas in height. Reaching up to the balance (the last quarter) of the trees, Para-Sankara added it along with the ocean of salt, when the flames began to make fearful sounds like unto peals of thunder caused by the crackling of the vast quantity of salt. The noise was so loud that Bhandasura and his hosts trembled at it and rushed out to find what it all meant. Maha-Sambhu then grasped the entire ocean of Milk with a mighty ladle and fed it to the spluttering flames.

Not satisfied with having offered the above-mentioned oceans, Maha Sambhu now determined to offer all the Lokas. So, drawing all snakes to him by the power of his own Vayu-Rupa, he made Karkotaka and others fall directly into the flames.

Then he called the eight elephants guarding the eight directions. These, (Airavata, Pundarika, Vamana, Kumuda, Anjana, Pushpadanta, Sarvabhauma and Supratika) along with their wives (Abhraka, Kapila, Pingala, Anupama, Tamraparni, Subhradanti, Gandhavati, and Anjanavathi) jumped into the flames. Then came people from Bharata-varsha, Kimpurusha-Varsha, Harivarsha, Kuru-Varsha, Bhadrasva-Varsha and Ketumala-varsha, and offered themselves in sacrifice. When thus Rasatala and Bhutala had become empty, Maha-Sambhu offered, as sacrifice, all the planets and also the devatas. Indra and his Dik-palas (Indra, Agni, Yama, Nairiti, Varuna, Vayu, Kubera and Isana) Sura, Kinnara, Charanangha Kimpurushas, siddha-sadhyas and all other devas decorated themselves in festive clothes and ornaments and offered themselves as sacrifice. The wives of the Dik-palas (Sachidevi, Svahadevi, Syamaladevi, Dirghadevi, Kalikadevi, Anjanadevi, Chitra-rekha and Isana) also entered the flames, accompanying their husbands. The twin Aswins, the eight Vasus (Apu, Dhruva, Soma, Adharva, Anila, Pratyusha, Anala and Prabhasa) the twelve Adityas (Aryama, Mitra, Aruna, Arka, Bhaga, Indra, Vivasvanta, Pusha, Parjanya, Tvashta, Vishnu and Ajaghanya), the eleven Rudras(Ugra, Soma, Sarva, Mrigavyadha, Rantija, Bhikshuka, Ahirbudhnya, Pinaki, Padukesvara, Kapalikeya and Bhauma), and the Pitruganas also fell into the flames gladly. Accompanied by Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanathkumara and Sanatsujata and other great Munis, bearing his five weapons, with Luxmidevi and Bhudevi by his side, Lord Vishnu with a radiant smiling face fell into the flames of Samvid-Agni.

Then came Lord Shiva accompanied by Bhringi, Nandi, Vinayaka, and the Ganas who, worshipping the Chid-Vahni, entered it with characteristic calm and peace.

Then followed sixty-six crores of deva-ganas and apsaras while Bhandasura and Tarakasura silently gazed in scorn at the great Homa-Kunda which was swallowing up all life in the three worlds.

Then approached Brahma with Marichis and tapasvins, riding on his swan fully bedecked and flanked by Sarasvathi, Savitri and Gayatri;and they all offered themselves as sacrifice, desiring the welfare of the three worlds in a new creation. The Four Vedas with the six Darshanas personified had also entered the flames along with those who were responsible for their propagation.

Thus, after offering up all in the three worlds, Maha-Sambhu was left alone with the Chid-Kunda, the flames of which were now rising to the top edge of the material universe. He then completed the Maha-Homa and, leaving his Vayu-Rupa, assumed his own Svakara and started praying to Lalita Paramesvari to emerge from the Sacrificial Chid-Agni-Kunda, thus :

ASHTAKARIKA PATAM (STHUTI)

1) May Devi Lalita, of the Essence of the Universe, the Atma of one and all, the Ruler and Unifier of all the Elements, may this Supreme Queen and Protectress Divine, emerge from this sacrificial fire of Divine Wisdom!

2) Of the Form of Supreme Joy, beyond all manifestation, the Grantor of Joy and bliss to all the worlds, may Devi Lalita the supreme Queen and Protectress, emerge from this sacrificial fire of Wisdom!

3) Of the united Form of Knowledge - Knower - and object of knowledge, the Illuminator of Divine wisdom, may Devi Lalita, the supreme Queen and Protectress, emerge from this sacrificial Fire of Wisdom!

4) Capable of destroying the worlds, and of the Form of Time and the Swallower of Time, May Devi Lalita, the supreme Queen and Protectress, emerge from this sacrificial Fire of Wisdom!

5) Capable of rejuvenating and sheltering the worlds of Form and source of All-auspiciouness, May Devi Lalita, the Queen and Protectress, emerge from this sacrificial Fire of Wisdom!

6) The sole creator and Ruler of the Mighty Universe, may Devi Lalita, the supreme Queen and Protectress, emerge from this sacrificial Fire of Wisdom!

7) Of a Form capable of regenerating all creation from this same sacrificial Fire, may Devi Lalita, the supreme Queen and Protectress, emerge from this sacrificial Fire of Wisdom.

8) Ever revelling in torturing such evil-doers as Bhandasura and Tarakasura, may Devi Lalita, the supreme Queen and Protectress, emerge from amidst this Sacrificial Fire of Divine Wisdom!

DEVI LALITA APPEARS

As Maha Sambhu completed his prayer, there appeared a magnificent chariot, with Lalita Parameswari, at the junction of the descending flames of Maha-Sambhu's Chid-Agni (Super consciousness) and the ascending flames of the mighty Homa-Kúnda, lighting the Universe with a rare splendour like unto a million rising suns and cool as a million full-moons.

The Sri-Chakra Chariot of Devi Lalita occupied an extent of four yojanas and rose to a height of ten yojanas, consisting of nine tiers, resplendent with radiant effulgence. This Mahachakra of the Four Vedas capable of granting the four objects of existence (Dharma, Ardha, Kama and Moksha) and displaying the scintillating flag of Ananda, was the mighty, Meru-Prastara Chariot of Sri-Chakra-Raja of Devi. On the ninth and top-most tier was seated Sri Devi Lalita of four arms, bedecked in all varieties of celestial ornaments, a Brahmacharini of ever-sixteen-years of youthful beauty and charm-unexcelled in all the Worlds! Desiring to regenerate the three worlds again, Sri Devi caused a most handsome, male, youthful Form to emerge from Her own Self-more handsome and alluring than a thousand Kamadevas put together, and also of ever-sixteen-years of youthful charm and vigour). Making this Kamesvara her consort and husband for the creation and welfare of the worlds,

Devi Lalita sat on the left lap of Lord Kamesvara and became known as Kamesvara-Kamini or Sri Maha Kamesvari. Then, by Her mere desire, there appeared in Her four arms, as also those of Her spouse, four pairs of divine weapons of wondrous power; Each of them had a sugar-cane bow, a bunch of five Arrows, a noose and a goad.

Beholding Devi Lalita with the four weapons, seated on the lap of Sri Kamesvara on the Chakra-Raja, shining with the brilliance of a thousand Suns, cool as the moon-beams, wearing a crown adorned with the half-moon, with a full, heavy and prominent bosom, ever youthful as at sixteen years, with a smiling face and with looks showering nectar, Maha-Sambhunadha the Maha-Hota worshipped them both with uplifted hands and sang many a song of praise expressive of the subtlest meanings of the Vedas, and made obeisance to them over and over again.

Intending to regenerate the devas Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesa first, Sri Devi Lalita looked into the eyes of Lord Kameswara with parananda when lo! from her left eye like unto the moon, emerged Luxmi and Brahma, from the right eye, like unto the Sun, Mridani and Vishnu; from the third eye, like unto the Fire, Rudra and Vagdevi. Brahma and Luxmi shone like lightning, Vishnu and Mridani like solidified Jyoti; and Sarva and Vagdevi shone pure and beautiful. Vishnu took unto himself his wife Luxmi, Sarva his Sarvani, and Brahma his Sarasvathi. Looking kindly upon the three couples, Sri Devi Lalita entrusted them with their respective works of creation, protection and destruction. Having thus been the first to be regenerated, the Trimurtis, now glowing in their newly-won-bodies, went to their respective Lokas after worshipping Devi and taking her gracious blessings. Sri Devi Lalita then continued to regenerate the three worlds and all there-in which emerged with a new beauty and resurgent joy.

THE NEW RESURGENCE

AGASTHYA Oh Great Lord Asvanana! I have heard from thee how the Maha-Yaga had been performed and how Sri Devi Lalita manifested Herself from the Chid-Agni-Kunda and how She regenerated the Trimurties.

Kindly now describe to me, in detail, how Devi then accomplished the task of regenerating all that had perished in the mighty Yajna as a result of the Kama Pralaya.

HAYAGRIVA O Munichandra! Listen! I shall now describe to thee the matchless emanation of the new resurgent creation from different parts of the wondrous body of Sri Devi Lalita who brought everything into being by merely looking upon Her Consort Kameswara in Parananda! From Her Hair-knot, there arose Darkness and the dark (Thimira) ganas; from Her Three eyes, the Sun, Moon and Agni; from Her Pearly forehead and the edges thereof the starry dust and the nine planets;

Dhanda-niti or Laws of governance and punishment emanated from Her Ajna-Chakra; the Four Vedas emanated from Her exhaled air, the science of Music, Dance, Drama, poetic and other compositions from Devi's sweet voice arose. For the welfare of the entire Galaxy arose Ambika from the fold of Her brow.

Sarasvathi emanated from Her tongue, with power to continue creation from moment to moment. From Her Chin emanated Chakorakshi, the Vedangas, Shat-Mimamsa, Nyaya-tantra, Purana and Brahma-Samhitas. From the upper fold or line over her throat arose Sakala-Ambika; Ayurveda and Dhamurveda;from the middle line; Gandharvam and sculpture, from the bottom fold.

The sixty-four Vidyas arose from the dent in the neck;

Prosody from Amsadesa; Madanagama from the armpit-region;

From her Two full breasts, there emanated the ashtakula mountains;

From her Sides, the firmament and the directions;

From Her Manas, Ananda-Shakti,

From Her Arms, the eight pasas or nooses;

From her hair, all the chiefs of snakes;

From Her fingers, the five arrows (of Kama)

From the nailends of Her ten fingers, the ten avatara bodies of Lord Vishnu (Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Nrisimha, Vamana, Parasu- Rama, Sri Rama, Bala Rama, Sri Krishna and Kalki)

From the Crimson colour of Her two hands, the dawn and dusk;

From Her Face, Indra;

From Her Prana, Vayu;

From Her Navel, Asid;

From Her Head, Svarga-Loka;

From Her Feet, the Earth;

Dharma and Adharma from Her looks;

From Her smiling eyes, Paramananda;

Purusha from Nabhikunda;

Prakriti frin Nabhimula

Mahat-tattva from Her Hips

Ahangkara from her groins

Tan-Matras from Her Knees

Pancha Bhutas from Her Calves

The Seven Oceans issued from Her ankles

Rasatal from Her Feet

The cows arose from the hair on her body

Brahmanas from Her Face

Kahatriyas from Her Shoulders and arms

Vaisyas from Her thighs, Sudras from Her Feet

The seed-born trees etc. from the pores of her Hair

The sweat-born from Her Sweat

The Womb-born from Her Middle

The Egg-Born from Her ankles

The Twin Aswins from Her Nostrils

Kirti from the sheen on Her Teeth

Pushti from the wealth of Her Ananda

Kanti from the Crest of Her forehead.SRI BALA TRIPURASUNDARI emanated from Devi's heart and is Her dear daughter, ever of nine years' youthful figure.

SRI SYAMALA DEVI emanated from Devi's Buddhi; and is Her Chief Minister, full of song.

MAHA VARTALI DEVI emanated from Devi's Ahamkara and is Her Commander-in-chief; VIGHNESVARA (with Siddha-Luxmi by his side) arose on smiling at Her lord Kamesvara;

THE SHADANGA MANTRAS (Shadamnaya) arose from the Shat-Chakras of Devi's Body.

BALA-MANTRA of three letters (Ime Kleem Sauh) from Her Play arose.

SAMPATKARI DEVI emanated from Devi's Goad

ASWAARUDA DEVI emanated from Devi's Noose

NAKULI DEVI emanated from Devi's jaws, GAYATRI DEVI emanated from the rays emanating from Devi's Body

DEVI'S SKIN DHATU was responsible for the emanation of all Devas

DEVI'S BLOOD DHATU for Prana-Shakti

DEVI'S FLESH DHATU for great strength and vigour

DEVI'S BRAIN DHATU for Vibhutis or psychic and other powers

DEVI'S BONE DHATU for Her Noose and Goad

DEVI'S MARROW DHATU for Yajna Vidya, Guhya - Vidya and Devi's

own SRI VIDYA.

From DEVI's RAJASAH emerged Varuni Devi, yielding nectar;

And Ananga rose from Devi's looks (askance) of grace, and

Sri Luxmi from Devi's beauty of Form.

From Devi's Feet emerged Maha-Patala Loka

From Devi's Ankles emerged Patala Loka

From Devi's calves emerged Rasatala Loka

From Devi's knees Mahatala Loka

From Devi's Thighs Sutala Loka;

From Devi's groins Vitala Loka

From Devi's Hips Atala Loka

From Devi's Feet Bhuloka

From Devi's Middle emerged Bhuvar Loka

From Devi's two breasts emerged Suvar loka

From Devi's shoulders (& arms) emerged Mahar Loka

From Devi's Arms emerged Jana Loka

From Devi's Neck (Throat) emerged Tapo Loka

From Devi's Head emerged Sathya Loka.

ILL OMENS BESET SUNYA NAGARA

On seeing the Samvit Spanda or vibrations due to the approach of Sri Lalitadevi's hosts for battle against Bhandasura every danava was filled with anxiety and forebodings of disaster. The city of danavas extant on Mahendra mountain on the banks of Maharnava Lake was named Sunyaka Nagara (city of Illusion). Bhandasura ever lived in this city with his trusted brothers Vishukra and Vishanga and the rest of his family. This city extending over a hundred yojanas now shuddered and shook while its asura population quailed and trembled with premonitions of utter destruction. Evil omens filled the atmosphere: From moment to moment, the city got clouded as if by smoke and, without any warning whatever, there rained meteoric showers from out of the darkening firmament. A severe earth-quake, most untimely, shook the city at its roots. As harbingers of evil, crows and kites sat at the tip of the flag staffs or standards of Sunyaka Nagara. The asuras could not see the face of the sun; for their sight became dazed and dim while their heads seemed to turn round and round with giddiness. There arose a harsh sound as of a voice from the firmament striking terror into the hearts of the asuras. All the directions looked dusty and distorted with smoke and flames. The daitya-ladies, without any cause whatever allowed their dress and ornaments to slide loose from their bodies and began to weep and shout for help. The mirrors lost their lustre; the shields, the flags and standards and all weapons of war including all ornaments and gems became lustreless and filled with dust. Weeping and general uproar burst forth, with harsh words and abusive language, when they saw their homes crumbling to nothing before their very eyes. The frogs began to croak at the hidden sun; the water turned bloody-red in colour.

Witnessing such catastrophies both on the ground and in the firmament, the populace of the town ran in terror to the palace of their Lord Bhandasura. Listening to their tales, Bhanda himself lost courage, though filled with rage; and hastened to the Durbar hall where he collected his brave brothers and ministers together for consultation. There, seated on his throne bedecked with rare gems and ornaments, Bhandasura shone resplendent in all his great glory. The Durbar hall measured one yojana in extent; and his throne was elevated so as to be visible to one and all. Seated on either side of him were Vishukra and Vishanga who, though valiant vanquishers and terrorisers of the three worlds were ever subservient and most loyal to their elder brother, Lord Bhandasura. All the daitya Lords assembled in the hall rose up one by one and, pronouncing their names, saluted him humbly and looked into his august eyes ready to obey the slightest movement in them. Each resumed his seat in obedience, and with great respect, while Bhandasura remained in august and silent expectation.

BHANDASURA AND HIS MINISTERS CONFER

Addressing his elder brother and Lord of the danavas, Vishukra spoke up in tones resembling the breakers of a mighty Ocean.

"O Lord! unable to withstand thy great and superb might and finding no succour from any quarter, our foes the devas kindled a huge fire and threw themselves into it in despair. Out of the flames however, rose a female form, vibrant with energy and proud of her great strength, beauty and power. She re-generated the forms of the devas from out of the flames; and has surrounded herself with other hosts of her own sex, each well armed with powerful weapons of war. How can women, though armed, fight us who are fierce and invincible? Should she manage to defeat us, it would sound as though delicate and soft sprouting leaves were able to break through the hardest of rocks, and would it not be a shame! Neither Indra nor his mighty hosts could stand up against you; who made even Brahma shudder and flee; Vishnu's famous discus was made ineffective and even Shankara fled from us. What then of others? Is it not a wonder then that a mere woman is now moving to battle against us with impunity? But a foe is a foe; and none should be left alive. The foe should be uprooted without leaving any remnant behind. Let us not be unaware of danger because the foe happens to belong to the weaker sex. Allow me to send one of my warriors to her and bring her here dragging her by the hair. Be not lenient to her because she is a woman; for she is our foe and, therefore, must perish."

Listening to Vishkura's words, Bhandasura's wrath subsided and he remained silent. Then rose Vishanga the wise and spoke thus to his eldest brother and Lord Bhandasura:

"My Lord! There is nothing that thou dost not know. Yet, it is my duty to speak out my thoughts before thee so that thou mayst do what thy great wisdom dictates, after considering our varying points of view. That which is accomplished after due consideration of all pros and cons is ever successful; not so what is done in haste and without mature thought. The latter conduct may even bring harm. It is always wise to depute able spies into the armies of the enemy so as to guage their strength and compare with our own. The able spy will be always doubtful of what he sees or hears but will create no doubt about himself; he shall be a very close minister attached to his Lord and be clever and courageous and capable of utilising the six different varieties of yukti and upaya.

It is not safe for a king to slight his opponent on the ground of sex or status, caste or creed, for Shakti is present in one and all. It is necessary always to explore, judge and weigh the Shakti of the opponent, whoever he or she may be. Did we not hear how the lion-faced-one proceeded out of a mere pillar and slew the mighty Hiranyakasipu? Also did not Chandika a female-slay Nishumbha and Shumba as well as the great Mahishasura? It is not wise, therefore, O Lord, to be complacent because our opponent now happens to be a mere female. Shakti can dwell quite equally in both male and female. Whichever Shakti is mightier wins, irrespective of male or female. Hence it is not wise to slight a female who is full of Shakti; for it is Shakti alone that wins and naught else."

Vishanga's words kindled the wrath of his brother again. Bhandasura knit his brows in anger at Vishanga's fear of a woman; and he said "O you Coward and sinner against the asura chiefs! How can you speak thus of a woman and her Shakti in front of all these great asura chiefs? It is most shameful of you. Knowing

well my great strength and that of my hundred akshouhinis capable of swallowing up all oceans and burning the three worlds, thou speakest ill. I have already sent spies and well ascertained the strength of this woman surrounded by her many Shaktis; and I tell you there is naught to fear. She is born of the fire and hence indeed bright and beautiful and delicate of form as her name Lalita implies. She means to help the devatas against us but where is strength in her arms? I see no great weapons in her possession. There is not a single man with her. All her followers are womenfolk - indeed beautiful and desirable beyond doubt. But they desire war with us and I hear their leader Lalitha is full of Mayavic powers. Why fear her, O brother? Let her come to fight us with all her female hosts. Let the devata hosts also help her if they will. Will your Bhanda be frightened? Bhanda is ever victorious. Fear not. Think of all the victories we had in the three worlds. Think how the suras shrank and shrivelled up because of our secret might. Did they not change their shapes to escape from us? Did they not run to other nether worlds in search of protection and fail? Did they not flee, leaving their wives, children, beautiful homes, gardens, and cities? Will not this Lalita also soon realise that I am her Lord? She and her followers still do not know my might. Know you not what able chiefs serve me on the battlefield- ever alert to vanquish my foes? Let me remind you of them by naming them individually:-

Kutilaksha, Kuhunda, Karaka, Kakavarita, Vajradanta, Vajramukha, Vajraloma, Vatahaka, Sichimukha, Phalamukha, Vikarna, Vikatanana, Karalakesha, Karataka, Dhamana, Dirghajivaka, Humbeka, Huhumulla, Kalkara, Kalkivahana, Pulkasa, Pundraketu, Chandabahu, Kukkara, Jambukaksha, Jambhana, Tikshmasranga, Trikhanda Chandragupta, Chaturbahu, Chakoraksha, Chatursiraska, Vajraghosa, Urdhvakesa, Mahamaya, Mahahanu, Maghasatru, Maghaskanda, Simhadhatu, Sirala, Kandhaka, Sindhumetra, Kupaka, Kupalochana, Guhakesha, Gandagalla, Chandavarma, Yamantaka, Hattans, Pandasena, Purujit, Purvamaraka, Swargasatru, Swargabala, Durgakhya, Swargakanta, Kethimaya, Maladha, Kasura, Mangala, Dhrghana, Kollata, Kutilasva, Dhasera, Badhruvahana, Dhushtahara, Dhustaketu, Parikerhit, Papakanchuka, Mahamoha, Mahadhamshtra, Dhurmati, Svargamejaya, Sataketu, Satavasu, Satadauta, Sataprya, Dhursata, Dhurvinits, Bhimakarna, Chamrra, Kattahasi, Mahahasi, Sihahasi, Madhotkata, Kumbhotkacha, Kumbhanasa, Kumbhagriva, Kutodhara, Hastimedra, Mahanda, Kumbhanda, Putinaskis, Putidanta, Putichakshut, Putyasya, Putimchanadha and other commanders equal unto Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu; also my thirty sons who are of great might; and each one of them has a hundred valiant sons again. There are commanders equal unto my mighty sons, who can destroy all amaras. If my commanders each of whom is in charge of a thousand akshouhinis, be angered, the battle field would be razed to ashes. Why then do you fear that woman full of maya? Have I not maha mayas equal unto her and much more? Fear not, therefore, and rise up for battle."

So saying, Bhandasura rose from his high jewel-studded throne and calling unto him his commandant Kutilaksha, said:

"Go and gather our armies and station them around our city that the enemy may not be able to penetrate into it. Have dushtabhicharas performed by ministers, purohits and other great ones; get together all the mighty and famous weapons.

The battle is drawing nigh. Send a mighty commander, first, to capture Lalita and bring her here by seizing her hair." So saying Bhanda retired to his (antahpura) inner chambers.

BHANDASURA PREPARES FOR WAR

Hayagriva continued : While Kutilaksha, Bhandasura's commander in charge of three thousand armies, was taking steps to guard the city of Sunya Nagara, Devi's Shakti-hosts made a terrific din advancing towards it, making not only the town tremble but the three worlds themselves. Led by Kutilaksha, however, the danava hosts rose up like unto a huge ocean with billows ready to fall on the Shakti-hosts of Devi, creating in their turn a terrific turmoil deafening in all directions. The asuras were armed with all manner of harsh weapons capable of inflicting instantaneous death of thousands at a time; their war-drums and other musical (or rather unmusical) instruments struck terror in the hearts of the living; they rode on all kinds of animals which latter also were wild, fierce and terrible to behold. The ugly faces of the asura-warriors were twisted with wrath; and their drunken red eyes bulged and shot out flames as it were.

Kutilaksha called unto him one of his Asura heroes by name Dhurmadha and said to him: "O Dhurmadha, go now with ten akshouhinis and other danava warriors to Lalita and bring her here forthwith; go now and delay not."

Dhurmadha was elated at the task and was proud that the choice had fallen on himself. He gathered together a mighty army and marched with such din and fanfare that the sun was dimmed further by the dust so raised; the hills and forests resounded and trembled; the oceans rolled high and the skies shook, as it were, with fright.

As per orders of his Lord Bhandasura, Kutilaksha placed a hero, Talajangha with ten akshouhinis at the eastern gate of the city, at the southern gate he placed Talabhiya. Talagriva guarded the western gate and Talaketu the, northern, all with ten akshouhinis each, and well armed. Another ten akshouhinis he placed for the safety of Adi Desa. Kutilaksha then reported to his Lord Bhandasura all that he had done; and the latter was well pleased at the arrangements.

SAMPATKARI DEVI SLAYS DHURMADHA

Meanwhile the asura chief Dhurmadha marched his armies right into the ranks of the Shakti-hosts and began a hideous slaughter. The Shakti-hosts in turn met them with powerful weapons and with shrill voices encouraged one another and fell en mass on the danava hosts scattering and maiming them in large numbers. Sampatkari Devi then espied the ten Akshouhinis of Dhurmadha and rushed into their midst with numberless shaktis equal unto her in might; and soon the battlefield turned red with streams of blood and resembled the crimson firmament at dusk. The ugly demons became more wrathful and threw themselves on the beautiful damsels with intent to sever off their heads but the latter rained invincible arrows and scattered the asuras. The elephant vahanas of the damsels trod indiscriminately on the danavas crushing them to death. Seeing the ugly fate of their brethren, the danavas lost heart and began to flee from the field. Dhurmadha, however, gathered

them together again and, instilling hope and courage into their hearts, led them forward once more, he himself riding on a high camel. Approaching the beautiful damsels again, Dhurmadha shouted out to them and said: "O Ye Damsels', why have you left your modesty and shyness and come to battle thus? Know ye not that I can take all of you alive and imprison you in my city? So saying, he advanced towards them at great speed. Sampatkari Devi, with eyes flashing with fire got on to her Madhadhanti and while her mighty elephant Kolahala sped before her, she let loose a crore of arrows simultaneously from her hands. The first set of arrows darkened the skies with their number. The following set of arrows grazed against the former set and flames and sparks lit up the ground and burnt the danava hosts. Seeing the wondrous sight Dhurmadha also sent out heapful of arrows to counter hers. The very grazing of these fast moving arrows set up fires and burnt many a warrior. In the meanwhile, Kolahala, the mighty elephant of Sampatkari Devi ran into the danava hosts and began to kill thousands of them, by trampling and crushing some, by slashing some with her tremendous trunk and by piercing others with her long and sharp tusks. Astonished at the might of this elephant Kolahala and the dexterity of Sampatkari Devi, Dhurmadha became very wrathful and, approaching the ferocious elephant, he drew an arrow with all his might and sent it right into the crown of Sampatkari Devi so that the crest -jewel flew away from it. Deciding to put an end to Dhurmadha's cruelty and sins committed against deva damsels and wives of Bhusurothamas and her own Shaktis now in particular, Sampatkari Devi shook with great wrath and sent a powerful arrow right into his heart driving his life instantaneously from his huge and sinful body. With the death of Dhurmadha, his hosts again began to flee from the field. Many fell a prey to the arrows and other deadly weapons of the Shakti pursuers and only a few escaped to Sunya Nagara to relate their tale of woe to their Lord and master Bhandasura.

On hearing this unbelievable news of defeat by "delicate" damsels, Bhandasura ground his teeth and ordered Kutilaksha to send Kurunda with twenty akshouhinis. Kutilaksha bowed in obedience to his Lord and calling Kurunda forthwith, he said unto him:

"O brave and mighty Kurunda, this woman seems to be full of wiles, for how else could she have vanquished Dhurmadha the mighty one? you are conversant with maya and can certainly subdue her pride and bring her here dragging her by her hair. Be not lured and blinded by her beauty or charms. Use your mayavic powers and make her surrender herself to you. Take twenty akshouhinis with you and surround her Shakti-hosts and subdue them.

ASVARUDA DEVI SLAYS KURUNDA

Filled with wrath and sorrowing at the death of his brother-commander Dhurmadha, Kurunda, seated on a mighty horse, marched his twenty akshouhinis with great speed and stopped his armies right in front of Sampatkari Devi and her mighty elephant Kolahala. He gazed at her in wonder and, remembering how she had just slain his mighty brother Dhurmadha, he addressed her thus:

'Oh murderess! Be not proud that you have slain my brother Dhurmadha. You shall soon taste the power of my arrows and weapons and your beautiful body shall

become unrecognisably gory and ghastly! Lo, prepare to fight me. My rakshasa women are waiting to drink your blood and that of your damsels! come! you shall now pay for the loss of Dhurmadha with your own life!" So saying, Kurunda ordered his danava hosts to surround the Shakti hosts without delay. Watching the new mode of warfare of Kurunda, Sampatkari Devi also retaliated in like manner. In the meanwhile, Asvaruda Devi, watching a new war starting, approached Sampatkari Devi and smilingly addressed her thus with gentle and sweet words: "O sister Sampatkari! Please listen to me. You have done well in slaying Dhurmadha. Give me this chance now to deal with this Kurunda. I know you can yourself make short work of him. Nay, I do not doubt your might. I beseech you to give me a chance too, and I will punish him well for speaking such ill words to you." Samptkari Devi smiled at Asavaruda Devi and retreated with her elephants.

Asvaruda Devi then brought in her cavalry and her own Shaktis to meet this new foe. Her crores and crores of horses galloped with the speed of wind and filled the battlefield with their mighty neighing and raised dust-storms with their fast-moving hooves. Asvaruda Devi's cavalry displayed lightning-like tactics against the danava hosts who could not act or react so alertly and hence became confused and scattered hither and thither. Kurunda, however, brought them back again with renewed energy. Seeing this, Asvaruda Devi, mounted on her mighty horse Aparajita approached Kurunda with all her great beauty of form, while excellent charms emanated from her exquisite presence and her bewitching face. Smiling still, she wielded her Manikarmuka and covered up Kurunda with showers of arrows. Undaunted, the mighty Kurunda who was famed for his mayavic powers and whose arrows had been invincible in former battles, now rose to the occasion. He in turn covered up Asvaruda Devi with showers of his invincible arrows without giving her time even to breathe. Clearing herself like lightning from the maze of Kurunda's arrows she turned her attention to the many hosts of Kurunda and twanged her wondrous bow. At that, every one of the danavas fell into a swoon. As they came to, she let fly her magic noose into the firmament when lo' crores and crores of nooses fell from the firmament and bound up the hosts of danavas. Seeing this wondrous act of Asvaruda Devi, the asura chief Kurunda used his mayavic power and cut the string of her bow in a trice. Instantly throwing aside the stringless bow, she wielded her goad angkusa with might and in great wrath, threw it at the danava aiming at his face, which it struck almost instantaneously. Kurunda fell with a thud to the earth and his face was broken and bleeding. Yelling hideously, he gave up his ghost. Immediately, Bhutha ganas surrounded the field and began devouring the danavas who had been already bound tight by nooses. Those who had escaped being bound by the mysterious nooses, had been devoured by Bhutaganas. Hearing this second disaster at the hands of mere women, Bhandasura cursed and hissed like a mighty snake.

On hearing Hayagriva relate these details, Agasthya thanked him and requested him to continue his very interesting and attention-arresting narrative.

THE SLAYING OF THE FIVE COMMANDERS - KARANGKA AND OTHERS

SRI HAYAGRIVA: With the news of the death of Kurunda, Bhandasura was overcome with grief for a while and he said to Kutilaksha: "Oh what evil fate is this?

How come that women are able to slay our mighty heroes? It is unimaginable on earth. The two mighty brothers Dhurmadha and Kurunda were invincible in battle and yet mere women have slain them'. Ha'. O Kutilaksha! Send now a hundred akshouhinis led simultaneously by our five great and courageous commanders Karangka and others. They will be able to defeat her easily."

Kutilaskha accordingly sent for the five commandants and bade them lead a hundred akshouhinis against Lalita's hosts. The dust and din raised by the hundred akshouhinis can scarcely be imagined. The engravings of fishes, snakes, etc., on the many standards (flags) carried by the armies made the whole scene appear like unto a muddy ocean with fishes, snakes, etc. floating on top.

Seeing the marching of the hundred akshouhinis under the leadership of the five great commanders Karangka, Kakavasita, Vajradanta, Vajramukha and Vajraloma, the heavens trembled in fear and wondered how Lalitamba's Shakti-hosts would be able to deal with them. They all remembered how the devata-hosts had last been routed by this same Karangka and his colleagues who had used the Mayavic and mysterious power of Sarpini to bring about the birth of Rana Sambari. The latter in turn had excelled as Dhumravarna, Dhumroshti, Dhumra Lamba payodhara and Mahadhadhi Gambhira Kuharodhara had brought forth crores and crores of snakes, even like unto Kadruva herself; and Indra remembered how his devata hosts had been defeated with the help of such mayavic and poisonous snakes.

Each excelling the other in prowess the five great chiefs marched their hundred akshouhinis dauntlessly into the ranks of the Shakti-hosts, when, for a moment all was hidden amidst the dust that had been raised. As the dust settled and cleared a little, the result of the initial melee and the clash of weapons became visible. Elephants and horses moved in streams of blood, chariots clambered over mountains of flesh, fresh hair of the Shakti hosts mingled with the blood from wounds and gashes. For a while, it was difficult to guage the strength of either side. Suddenly, however, Karangka and his colleagues bethought themselves of their earlier victory against the devatas by means of Sarpini Maya. They once again repeated the same manoeuvre. Soon, Sarprini appeared on the battle-field and brought forth crores and crores of dangerously-poisonous snakes like unto Ruksha, Karkotaka, Kakshaka, Vasuki and each with many hoods and fearful fangs capable of ejecting virulent poisons like Kalakuta, Saurashtra, Ghoravatsa and bringing forth flames through their virulence and thus burning the Shakti-hosts without mercy.

From the two eyes of Sarpini were born crores of snakes, each with a pair of hoods and resembling black nimbus clouds. They fell upon the Shakti-hosts and spread their venoms. From the mouth of Sarpini also sprang miriads of brown snakes, with four hoods each. Out of the nostrils of Sarpini there came forth countless three-hooded yellow snakes. Emerging from the ear-holes of Sarpini were snakes of fearful mien. Out of the navel emerged blood-coloured snakes vomiting hala-hala over the Shakti hosts who incessantly shot arrows aimed at them. As one snake was slain by the arrows, there arose many more in its place through Maya; and thus, very soon, the entire battle-field was teeming with venomous snakes. The sight was simply unbelievable . The Shakti-hosts were unable to escape from

the virulence of the poison poured out by these mayavic snakes which they could not put an end to. The damsels perished by the million and their sad fate seemed to be sealed with no escape from dire extermination.

Seeing the plight of these Shakti damsels, the five commandants grew bolder and rushed into the midst of the armies of Aswaruda Devi. Karangka riding on a chariot drawn by hundred donkeys, showered clouds of arrows like unto a hurricane; Kakavasita rode an elephant and hurled his discus killing armies of shakti damsels; Vajradanta rode upon his camel and slew many more with the aid of his diamond like sharp and hard arrows; Vajramukha rode on a donkey and slew crores of Shakti-damsels. Vajraloma rode on a chariot drawn by pairs of donkeys and slew many more crores of Shaktis. Seeing the success of their chiefs, the hundred akshouhinis fell upon the Shakti hosts with alacrity and new vigour; and Sarpini again sent forth a crore more of her mayavic poisonous snakes with great eclat. Asvaruda Devi's Shakti hosts were now in a very sad state indeed; and there seemed to be not a single ray of hope for them; when lo; Sri Lalitesani brought forth, out of her noble handsome and fair jaws a Devi by name Nakuliswari, riding on Garuda to help Aswaruda Devi. Nakuliswari Devi went forth like lightning into the suffering ranks of the Shakti hosts and proceeded straight ahead to oppose the stream of serpents issuing from Sarpini Maya. Out of her 32 teeth she instantaneously brought forth 32 crores of mongooses, golden in colour and sheen; and these hit and slew the serpents in their numbers so that there was soon quite a stream of virulent poison flowing amidst them. The slain serpents lay about in the form of a Kundali; and the gems that fell from their hoods shone wonderfully. Seeing the whole slaughter of the serpents created by her Maya, Sarpini was roused to unspeakable wrath and she rushed into the field but only to be stopped in her advance by Devi Nakuliswari who let loose a Garudastra from her bow-string. With Nakuliswari's permission, the astra penetrated the body of Sarpini and extinguished her serpent-maya so that she expired instantly, without being able to fight. Seeing Maya Sarpini die so easily the five commandants grew mad with anger and impelled their entire force to charge Nakuliswari's army of mongooses, but Devi Nakuliswari sent them all to Yama's abode in a matter of minutes. The commandants then let fly millions of arrows to destroy the mongooses but the latter chewed them up and climbing on to the faces of the danavas and reducing their size entered their nostrils and thus tortured them by tearing up their noses and in many other ways. Seeing the suffering of his danava hosts, Karangka released fiery and diamond-toothed arrows and smote the hosts of mongooses and severed their limbs so much so that they gathered around their Devi Nakuliswari in great distress.

Instantly, Nakuliswari let loose another great astra from her bowstring, whereupon crores more of mongooses were created with armoured skins and strong limbs and diamond-hard teeth. These invaded the danava armies and soon there were few left of the hundred akshouhinis. Karangka and his four colleagues now went to war against the hosts of mongooses; but Devi Nakuliswari, riding on her Garuda flew to Karangka and be-headed him in a trice. In the very next moment, her Vahana Garuda pounced upon the other four commandants; Kakavasita, Vajrandanta, Vajramukha and Vajraloma and plucked off their heads. Seeing such

great dexterity in Nakuliswari Devi, Syamala Devi - the Chief Minister of Devi Lalita was well pleased and took her as her own body-guard.

Lord Hayagriva then observed: "O Kumbhasambhava, you see how every one with rare qualities pleases one and all immensely and is highly honoured."

THE SLAYING OF THE SEVEN COMMANDANTS - VALAHAKA AND OTHERS

HAYAGRIVA : After Karangka and his colleagues were slain by Nakuliswari, the few, who could manage to escape death, out of the mighty army of the hundred akshouhinis, returned to Sunyaka Nagar in great fear and related the course of incidents in detail to their Lord Bhandasura. He could scarcely believe that five of his able commanders who had been successful in previous campaigns against the devatas could now be put to death by one Lalita's Chief. Greatly disappointed and stricken with grief, he sighed again and again and at last said to his Commander-in-Chief Kutilaksha: "O Bhadratma'! What ill fate is dogging our steps? How is it possible for Karangka and the rest, with Sarpini-Maya, in their possession to face such defeat though supported.by a hundred akshouhinis? That woman has indeed a greater power over Maya than the rest of us. Send now our Seven Commanders Valahaka and others with another hundred akshouhinis. They are very efficient in Kuta Yuddha and they will certainly be able to capture these women folk by their war-tactics, as they are born of the womb of Kikasa. Obeying his Lord's behest, Kutilaksha sent for Valahaka, Suchi Mukha, Phala Mukha, Vikrama, Vikatanana , Karataksha and Karataka, the seven warrior brothers who always cooperated and worked in unison, each strengthening the others. They came immediately and saluting their Lord and Master, departed on their mission with a following of three hundred akshouhinis. The armies were so vast that they resembled the gathering of vast clouds in the entire firmament. The thud of their movement on the ground shook it as an earth-quake would, and the dust raised thereby settled on the waters of the oceans turning them brown and thick; The noise of their war-drums and war music filled the firmament and echoed from mountains and forests.

With the desperate determination born of sorrow at the loss of so many danava warrior chiefs and the desire to be the vanquishers of this woman-foe of theirs, the seven war-lords well-armoured and well armed, advanced towards Lalita Devi's Shakti hosts. On beholding them, Devi ordered Her armies to charge the on-rushing foes. Armed with noose, pestle-like weapons, discus, swords, knives and daggers, axes and hatchets (Clubs) hammers, spears, bows and arrows the Shakti hosts, poured into the ranks of the advancing danava hosts. The seven danava chiefs shouted to them to come and mingle with them still more quickly and briskly for then it would make their task of sending them to Yama's abode much easier. For a while, however, they allowed the Shakti hosts to mingle with the danava hosts and quickly watched their strength and manner of battle and saw their danavas falling easily at their hands. They saw the damsels slaying numerous danavas at a time single-handed, and wondered at their courage and enterprise. The devata hosts watching from the firmament became joyful at such easy slaughter of their foes and began to shout and encourage the Shakti-damsels with great enthusiasm. One damsel fearlessly approached a danava and sliced off his head at the neck so suddenly that

the blood surged forth like a fountain from the headless neck. While kites and vultures gathered around in a cricle, another damsel countered the arrow of a danava and sent one right through his throat. Yet another damsel, riding a horse charged into her foe, also on a horse, and slashed at his chest sending him to Yama's abode. Yet another damsel rushing at a danava attacked his elephant vahana and cut off the two protrusions on its fore-head, resembling her two full breasts with her khadga; and in the same instant, she shattered the bow of the danava with her disc and hit him between his eye-brows. Here a damsel shot an arrow which cut into two the dagger in a danva's hand and sent him also to death's abode; there, a damsel chased a charioteer and attacked him with a spear exhibiting the strength of her loins, there was another woman who sent a series of daggers flying at a danava's chariot showing the strength of her handsome thighs. Very soon, however, the Shakti damsels had gone into the ranks of the danavas and the latter also had gone so far into the ranks of the Shakti hosts that the two hosts appeared as mixed as a mixture of water and milk - almost inseparable. Observing this opportune moment the danava chief Valahaka, born of flames and mighty in courage and maya-yukti rode on a fierce kite vahana by name Samharagupta, and rushed straight into the melee and released his invincible arrows. They mowed down the Shakti-damsels like hay, to the great joy of his danava hosts who acclaimed him with gladdened shouts of wonder. Flying on his mighty kite, he went around slaying the shakti damsels with his fiery arrows.

Suchimuka also, riding on a huge crow, moved about slashing at the damsels; his mount also disposed of numberless dames. It was now the danavas turn to jump in joy at such wholesale slaughter of damsels who hitherto had been making short work of them. Then came Phalamukha also and joined his brothers; Vikala, (Vikrama) soon followed. Vikatanana also joined riding on his cock which also began to maul and slay dames without number. The sixth brother, Karalaksha rode his activated corpse-mount into the battle-field striking terror into the ranks of his foes. He had once performed severe austerities in a cemetry and burial ground, and invoked, by power of his mantra a long-armed corpse with an indescribable face and prolonged feet. This corpse had agreed to become the vahana of Karalaksha. Then came the seventh warrior-brother Karataka carried by no other than the fierce Betala himself. Betala's body occupied a yojana in extent and his cruel eyes burned like fire. This Karataka also had performed severe tapas in a cemetry invoking Betala-Mantra and, as a result, Betala was pleased with him and agreed to become his Vahana on the battle-field. As the Shakti hosts had already mingled with the danavas as milk and water, it was now impossible for the damsels to retreat from the simultaneous and fierce onslaught of the seven brothers whose gruesome vahanas (mounts) also took part in the struggle. Then came a startling occurrence. The danava chiefs had a secret weapon which they reserved up to this opportune moment when the damsels were all enmeshed and surrounded on all sides by danava warriors. The seven Kaikasa chiefs had once made tapas with a view to invoke the Sun. Pleased with their long and austere tapas, the Deity Sun had appeared before them and had pressed them to accept a boon; whereupon they had desired that the Sun's power should reside in their eyes when invoked during war-time, and that his rays, falling on the foe should immobilise them and render their arms and weapons futile so that they (the Kaikasas) could easily slay the statue-like impotent foes with

impunity. This is exactly what suddenly happened amongst the Shakti-hosts as soon as the seven Kaikasa brothers had come into their midst and gazed at them with their mysteriously glowing eyes. The damsels all became still like statues unable to wield their weapons of war or even to move their limbs. While they were in such a pitiable plight, the danavas cut them down like so many logs of wood and they were in a most helpless situation. The fully-armed rakshasas now began to slay the powerless and virtually unarmed foe with impunity. Unable to escape their mysterious power emanating from the eyes of the Kaikasas, the wounded, maimed and bleeding damsels began mentally to pray to Laliteswari thus: O MOTHER and Creator of the entire Universe! O Lalitamba! Who ruleth over the good people, do protect us from this great calamity. Oh, come to our rescue speedily'." No sooner had this prayer been uttered than Lalitamba, the Ocean of Mercy looked at Varahi's body-guard and mighty warrior TIRASKARANI. Immediately Tiraskarani Devi climbed her mount named Tamolipta Vahana which was capable of looking on all sides simultaneously. Arming herself with the MOHANA - bow Tiraskarani Devi charged into the battle field with a terrfic war-cry and rained serpent like arrows; the rakshasas began to flee in all directions abandoning their statue-like-damsel victims. Advised by (Varahi) Dhandini Devi, Tiraskarani let loose the "blinding" astra on Valaha and his six brothers; whereupon they all became blind, so that the mysterious power of the Sun had no effect any more. Immediately the statue-like Shakti-damsesl got the use of their limbs and were able to move about and also use their many powerful-weapons, effectively led by Devi Tiraskarini; the damsels once more began their slaughter of the danavas constituting the three hundred akshouhini armies. They gratefully praised Devi Tiraskarini for releasing them by blinding the cruel danava chiefs and making them impotent. So the Devi was real Satru Tiraskarini; The Damsels persuaded her to slay the seven brothers instantly and earn the approval of both Varahi Devi as well as Syamalamba. Accordingly, Devi Tiraskarini caught hold of Valahaka by the hair of his head and beheaded him. She also slew his kite vahana with her arrows. On beholding this act of hers, the devas shouted in joy and begged her to slay the rest of the chiefs also. Going up to Suchimukha she sliced off his head with her broad sword and it rolled on the ground with its gem-studded crown. She gave the same treatment to the remaining five danava chiefs also in quick succession so that their heads also rolled on the ground helplessly. The Shakti damsels made the best use of their limbs and weapons and despatched most of the three hundred akshouhini armies to Yama's abode so that rivers of blood flowed on the battle-field. All those, who had escaped from this wholesale slaughter ran to Sunyaka Nagara and with great fear and trembling, reported the story of the defeat of the seven mighty Kaikasa warriors to their King Bhandasura whose heart sank at the baleful news.

Here, on the battlefield, Dandanayaki (Varahi Devi) prasied Tiraskarini for her wondrous skill, dexterity and resourcefulness and looked upon her with great favour, praising her again and again.

THE DEFEAT AND RETREAT OF VISHANGA

HAYAGRIVA: O MAHA MUNI AGASTHYA, Bhandasura, with his conviction of the inferiority of mere woman shattered, now began to scheme for the downfall of

Lalita by fair or by foul means. He, therefore, called a meeting of his confidential chiefs including the Yuvaraja Visukra and also Vishanga who came eagerly; for they were all stunned by the defeat of their mighty warriors and were ready to carry out any daring scheme, Mantra or Jantra that may be formulated, in their confidential concourse against Lalita and her hosts of mayavic Shakti-damsels.

Bhandasura sighing deeply like unto a mighty king of snakes addressed them thus: "Alas'. What has fate in store for us? What is our destiny to be? Are the suras now to excel us? How is it possible for so many of our capable and mighty warriors to persih at the hands of damsels? Shame on us'. It cannot be otherwise than the inexorable hand of fate or destiny! Whatever may be that destiny, it is not meet for us to anticipate defeat and grovel before these women, be they stronger and more wily. Let them be greater masters of Maya; we shall fight to the end - whatever that end may be. Self-effort has many a time won against blind fate. So then, let us devise ways and means of surmounting the present crisis and change the course of war in our favour. Let us not be idle; for idleness spells disaster. Fate and fortune always favour the active man who spares no effort to gain his end and leaves no stone unturned; for failures do not discourage him but serve as stepping stones to mightier ventures. Yet, in spite of all the efforts of man, he is but a plaything in the hands of Collective Destiny or Destiny of Nations. Have we not heard how fierce fate had made beggars of princes and vice-versa; how people with long life had become short-lived? How brave warriors had suddenly been rendered abject cowards? This broad universal scheme of things may not be changed by individual effort; nevertheless, without effort, he can but perish. Effort is needed even to be part of the scheme of things. Knowing not, what the end of a battle might turn out to be, it is but meet that each side should strive for success and put forth the utmost effort. Therefore, undaunted by previous failures, let us plan a new one for sure success, remembering that we are dealing not with an ordinary damsel but with a great force which has been capable of withstanding and overcoming our great Sarpini Maya and the bright Sthambana-gaze of the Kaikasas - not to speak of the hundreds of akshouhinis that have been vanquished by this strange damsel. We have thus far not succeeded in a straight war. I have sent spies and learnt something very useful to our future plan of action. I have learnt that Lalita's Chariot is stationed at the extreme west of her Shakti hosts who have advanced far east, and south so as to be able to fight with us, without disturbing their Queen. She has only a few Shakti-damsels around her as body-guards. It is our plan now to get to the rear and to reach her unobserved by her armies and capture her unawares after slaying her few attendant Shaktis. I consider Vishanga to be capable of putting this scheme into action. He can move unseen and unobserved by the enemy. He can take with him the very best fifteen chieftains with their fifteen akshonhinis. Lalita has no armies behind her to protect her on the western side. The few that stay in her presence can be easily disposed of by our able generals; and Vishanga is the most capable one to accomplish this task. He can move unnoticed and reach the back of the Shakti armies most skilfully and dexterously and succeed in capturing the queen of the damsels. So saying, he addressed his younger brother thus: "O brother Vishanga! Use your powers to make invisible yourself and those you take with you. Take fifteen chieftains with their fifteen akshouhinis. Lalita alone is your prize. She

is the Queen and prime mover against us. With her capture the very bottom will fall off the support of her many armies and Shakti-hosts. Just as the lotuses in a pond shrink up with the setting of the Sun, so will these Shakti damsels shrivel up the moment their Queen disappears. Listen to this again: To the west of the entire Shakti armies and separated from them all, is a mighty pearl of a chariot ten yojanas in extent with four mighty wings and bearing a high "Ananda" dhwaja (flag). In the midst of this Chariot at the top, resides the greatest beauty of all time (a young damsel of sixteen years'.) Go Ye soon direct to her and getting hold of her flowing tresses, return to me with your prize, while your fifteen chieftains engage her attending Shaktis in battle and vanquish them. If necessary, slay her on the spot. This is the only means of getting rid of her. Take now, with you, these fifteen great chiefs with their fifteen invincible akshouhinis. I shall call their names out to you:

1. Damanaka
2. Deerghajihva
3. Hunibeka
4. Hulumulla
5. Kalkasa
6. Kalkivahana
7. Pulkasa
8. Pundraketu
9. Chandabahu
10. Kukkura
11. Jambukasha
12. Jambhana
13. Teekshna Srnga
14. Trikantaka

and 15. Chandragupta

Go now, unseen, with these heroes and attack the unarmed Lalita from her back unawares, and return with success." Seeing Vishanga proceeding thus with intent to subdue Lalitamba by foul means, the bright sun suddenly grew dim for shame and hastened to the west to hide his head. No sooner had the sun hidden himself behind the western hill than the lotuses (Padmini) lost their consciousness and swooned with lowered heads. Which beautiful bride can lift up her head and look on her handsome husband when he is being forcefully taken away from her by another stronger hand? When the trunk of a tree is cut, how then can the leaves survive?

During the first day of the war, while rakshasa hosts were fighting a losing battle, dusk and darkness had come to their rescue. With the resurgence of Tamas and Andhakara the danava hosts grew in valour and strength. So now, as darkness reigned supreme inviting the danavas to war, strong in their maya prowess, Vishanga led his fifteen chiefs and their hosts, unseen, with daggers and swords unsheathed.

Damanaka and his colleagues and hosts, dressed in black, with arms and shields black too,mingled in the inky blackness of the night, and followed Vishanga with great expectations of capturing Lalita, the Queen herself.

They wore dark armours with pointed spikes agains their chests and dark visors to hide their faces. Not a war-drum was sounded. Silence reigned supreme in the darkness. Not a movement of theirs was discernible or audible. Manouvering north of the Shakti-hosts Vishanga and his associates intended to march west of them and reach behind Lalita unprotected by any armies. They planned to attack her chariot suddenly and unwares and unseen by the attendant Shaktis. They left Sunyakapura by the western gate moving stealthily without the slightest noise in the deep darkness. They passed around Lalita's hosts and armies unseen by any of them and reached the back of Lalita's chariot. The chariot resembled the mountain Meru, and was protected by a large number of exceptionally beautiful damsels, It shone effulgent in the surrounding darkness and scattered bright scintillating rays all around. On top was an umbrella of pearls and under it a maiden of dazzling beauty and attractive beyond description. She was brilliant like a thousand rising suns. She was facing east towards her armies and was surrounded by other equally beautiful damsels, serving her and keeping her company. Vishanga desired to capture her himsefl and so he ordered his colleagues to invade the chariot and attack the damsels therein. Having reached the back of the chariot and remaining unseen, they let fly sharp arrows and attacked Anima and other Siddhi-Shaktis who were occupying the ninth or bottom-most tier of the Sri Chakra Chariot. These Siddhi-devata Shaktis were taken unawares and unprepared for battle and they suffered grievous injuries for a moment. Soon, however, they armed themselves suitably; but as the foe was invisible neither could they attack them nor protect themselves sufficiently well. Gradually many Yoginis occupying the other higher eight tiers also began to be injured by arrows etc., from the invisible foes. They all brought this state of affairs to the notice of their Queen Lalita on the topmost tier. Informed of the cruel trick played by the danavas in starting this adharmic venture at night, of attacking unarmed and unprotected damsels while their armies and chieftains were far away, the Yoginis looked upon what was happening in anger and arming themselves well, let fly all types of weapons in all directions to wound the rakshasas. While this was going on, Bhandasura sent Kutilaksha with ten Akshouhinis to engage Lalita's armies in the west so that they may not be able to turn round and go to the help of their Queen who was herself being attacked.

As rakshasas grow stronder by night, the battle at both ends in front and at the back grew in magnitude and the damsels were having the worst of it. The danava chief, not satisfied by injuring the yoginis on the several tiers, now aimed his deadly weapons against the top-most point of the chariot with the flag, and brought it down to the earth. Beholding this act of Vishanga, Kameswari and other Nithya Devatas were moved to great wrath and approachig Lalita Devi, addressed her thus: :"Sri Devi! The danavas, observing that our Dhandini Devi and Mantrini Devi have taken our armies far from us towards the east and seeing that we are unprotected on the western side have come to attack us in the darkness and at our backs. Shame to them." They have made themselves invisible along with their weapons, and are

injuring our yoginis with impunity. If thou wouldst permit us, we Nithyas will proceed and put an end to their pride and valour in a moment. Vahnivasini and Jwalamalini alone should be sufficient to put an end to them all. With your permission we shall instantly slay them and teach these danavas a lesson that adharmic war never pays. Permit us Sri Devi", so saying they made obeisance to Lalitesani who smiled at them in approval.

Thus permitted by Lalita, the fifteen Nitya Devis turned on the danavas. Mahakameswari Nitya, holding a bow of the form of Kundali and with a face red with wrath at the adharmic attack on unarmed and unprotected damsels at night, shouted out thus to the foe: "Listen O sinful-minded danava' ! What manner of war is this at mid of night? You become invisible through your maya and attack unarmed damsels thus? Where is your courage? Where is your respect for the rules of war? Wait." I shall in a moment dispel your maya and send you all to Yama's sbode. O you durvruttatma. Your maya cannot withstand mine. Be ready to receive the brunt of our arrows and weapons now."

So saying, well-armed, Maha-Kameswari Nitya Devi descended from the Sri-Chakra Chariot, followed by her other Nitya-Devis. Immediately next to her were Bhagamalini, Jwalamalini and Vahnivasini. As they approached the danavas, the latter became bright and visible and overcome with wrath, lunged towards the Nitya-damsels. The Fifteen Nitya Devis made a blood-curdling noise resounding all around and charged towards the fifteen danava chieftains. There raged a terrible battle of weapons between the two parties and soon :

1. Damanaka was slain		by Kamesi
2. Deerghajihva	do	Bhagamalini
3. Humbeka	do	Nityaklinna
4. Hudumulla	do	Bherunda
5. Kalkasa	do	Vahnivasini
6. Pulkasa	do	Sivadhuti
7. Kalkivahana	do	Mahavajreswari
8. Pundraketu	do	Twaritamba
9. Chandabahu	do	Kulasundari
10. Kukkura	do	Nitya
11. Jambukaksha	do	Neelapataka
12. Jambana	do	Vijaya
13. Teekshna Srnga	do	Sarvamangalaka
14. Trikantaka	do	Jwalamalinika, and
15. Chandragupta	do	Chitra

No sooner had these fifteen chieftains been slain than the rest of the armies began to scatter. But Vishanga, in that semi-darkness, got them together again and waged war with the Nitya-Devis for a period of an hour but soon realised his inability to defeat or slay any of them. Kameswari Nitya Devi took out her bow and let fly potent arrows and made Vishanga impotent and bereft of his generative organ. With that, Vishanga decided to flee and, gathering whoever remained with him, retreated with all speed. As Vishanga was destined to be slain by Dhandini Devi herself later, he now managed to escape with his life. It was now time for sunrise; and the fleeing danavas were clearly visible in the growing light. The Nitya Devis allowed them to escape for they said it was not fair to pursue and kill a retreating foe.

Kamesi and other Nitya Devis, now successful, approached Lalitamba, taking with them all the damsels wounded by the sinful danavas. Devi was pleased with them and looking at them she smiled on them with approval and lo! the wounded became whole instantly and all were happy again.

BHANDASURA'S SONS SLAIN

In the meanwhile the ten akshouhinis with Kutilaksha, at their head waged war against Dhandini Devi's armies, without success. Kutilaksha also retreated from the battle leaving the ten akshouhinis to perish behind him.

Bhandasura was overcome with wrath and shame at the utter failure of his grand adharmic scheme to capture or slay Queen Lalita.

Dhandini Devi and Mantrini Devi also heard of the ghastly attack at the back of the armies and hastened to their Queen to learn of the outcome. It was sunrise by then, and the various yoginis had returned to their respective places on the nine-tiered Sri Chakra Chariot. There was no sign of any danava alive or around.

Both Syamala and Varahi Devis descended from their respective chariots, leaving their Shaktis in charge, and ascended the nine tiers of Sri Chakraraja Chariot. Reaching the top, they prostrated themselves before their Queen and spoke to Laliteswari thus :

"O Mother Divine! Queen of all the Worlds, Alas! We let the evil-minded danavas invade Thy Pure Sri Chakra Chariot unawares and unprotected. Bhandasura kept us engaged and away from Thee by sending his Commander-in-Chief to fight us in the front while he sent other evil geniuses to attack Thee from the rear! Desirous of success, he was not mindful of the purity of the means employed. Providentially, Thy Chariot is unharmed and the danavas have fled. We have faith in the protective power of Thy Lotus Feet. It is not meet, however, that the danavas should have been given this chance of attacking Sri Chakra Chariot. Hence we shall construct a camp, south of Mahendragiri by fence of flame. As Sunyaka Nagar is to our south, there should be a gate on the southern side of the fence of flame well-guarded by armed Shaktis not prone to sleep or laziness. Our armies shall be stationed in the centre of this flaming fence. Then the danava hosts will not be able to attack us unaware in future."

Smiling on them sweetly and with approval of what had been spoken, Devi Lalita said to them: "What you both have planned is a good yantra against danava inroads at unexpected moments. You may carry it out speedily. It is quite the right thing to have one's defences perfect before attacking those of a foe." Thus approving of their plan, Devi called unto Jwalamalini and said unto her: "Oh Sundari! As fire is bright by nature, a fence of flame will surely warn us of the approach of danavas even by night. Hence, put up this fiery fence - a hundred yojanas around and thirty yojanas high; and may this surround all our Shakti armies. Leave an opening on the southern side - one yojana in length, for a doorway, and guard it so that no foe may approach it but run for his life to escape being burnt by your fiery form."

So saying, Lalitamba withdrew north of Mahendragiri with all her armies.

In obedience to Lalita's orders, Jwalamalini Devi (the 14th Nitya Devi) after worshipping Devi's Lotus feet proceeded to construct a mighty fiery fence, surrounding the armies residing north of Mahendragiri. Shyamala and Varahi put Sri Devi's chariot in the Central Part. Syamala Devi's chariot was stationed on the right and Dhandini Devi's on the left of Sri Chakra. Behind them was Sampadiswari's and next Aswarudha's twenty akshouhinis, well-armed, were stationed at the door way on the southern side. Dhandini Devi then installed Sthambini Devi to remain at the gate. The Devi who was famed for Vighna and called by the name of Vighna Devi was also stationed at the gate. Thus protected, the Shakti damsels shouted mightily and got ready to invade the danava stronghold.

In the meanwhile, the rising sun grew in stature and heat and became red (with anger, as it were, at the mean scheme adopted by the danavas to attack unarmed damsels at night). The lotuses that had shrivelled up during that fateful night, now opened their faces again and smiled, as it were, at the sun, at the news of the victory of the helpless damsels and the shameful retreat of the danavas on either side of the Devi's armies.

SECOND DAY OF WAR:

With the dawn of day, Dhandini's forces exulted in their strength and proceeded out of the gate on the south of the Flaming Fence with intent to subdue the danavas whose strength usually waned with dawn and light and waxed only at night, in the dark. While the Shakti damsels were thus celebrating in glee and actually anticipating a wholesome war with the danavas, Bhandasura, who had been burning alive in shame and wrath, said unto his ministers thus :

"O Ye my ministers! What is it that I have heard? At night when we are supposed to be stronger, our fifteen heroes, unequalled in battle have been slain by mere damsels. The worst of it is our people's retreat before women who desisted from pursuing and slaying them though they could have done that too easily! What news is this? What has Fate and Destiny in store for us? Oh ye my brothers Visukra and Vishanga! What shall we do to get sure victory this next time at least? Methinks, I shall send my thirty great sons equal unto me in valour, might and Tantra".

So saying, he called his beloved and handsome sons unto him and bade them defeat the "beauties" and return victorious. He asked them to take adequate armies to support them. These thirty sons were eager for a war with these mysterious and mayavic damsels and they were confident of subduing them with their wiles and might and maya. So they thanked their worthy and lordly father and, saluting him, took leave with due respect. These thirty sons were named :

1. Chaturbahu
2. Kolaksha
3. Chatursiro
4. Vajraghosha
5. Urdhwakesa
6. Mahamaya
7. Maha hanu
8. Mahasatru
9. Mahaskandhi
10. Simhaghosha
11. Surala
12. Kandhaka
13. Sindhunetra
14. Krpaka
15. Krpalochana
16. Guhaksha
17. Gandala
18. Chandavarma
19. Yamantaka
20. Landana
21. Pandasena
22. Purujit
23. Purvamaraka
24. Swargasatru
25. Swargabala
26. Durghakhya
27. Swargakanta
28. Kathimaya
29. Bruhanma
30. Yopamaya

These 30 sons of Bhandasura were equal to their parent in all respects. Seeing them ready to do battle against the deluding and elusive damsels, he looked at them with grateful eyes and lovingly addressed them thus:

"O Gems among danavas! Was it not through your valour that I was victorious over Indra and was able to conquer his Swargaloka? There are no astras extant that ye do not know. There is no Mantra that you have not learnt. It has therefore fallen to your lot to save our race from defeat and shameful extinction. It does not sound brave to send you all to slay mere women, but they were full of maya and have already slain some of our best heroes. Go ye, therefore, and burn them all up to the despair of the on-looking suras and devas! With your effort and valour, change the fortunes of war in our favour and may Fate and Destiny be kind to us now. Alas! Have I to tell you all these? Never mind! Return victorious. That is all I want of you."

So saying, he sent them with two hundred akshouhinis, blessing them and hoping for sure victory.

As the thirty sons of Bhanda marched out of Sunyaka Nagara followed by two hundred akshouhinis, the earth shook under their feet. All the women and maidens

of the town came out and showered sweet-scented flowers on them and praised them with sweet songs and danced in joy and hope before their path. The elderly ladies waved harathis burning camphor wishing them success and safe return.

The thirty sons of Bhanda thus started on their mission to defeat and capture the Shakti hosts of Lalita. They discoursed, on the way how they would swallow the entire Shakti armies, how they would torture the damsels with their weapons, also how they would wound and bind Lalita and put her in prison to the extreme joy of their father. Thus discoursing on what all they would do, they reached the boundary of flame surrounding Lalita's armies and raised a terrible din and noise that shook the earth and sky and churned up the oceans. The Shakti armies trembled at such a mighty roar for their ear-drums almost burst. Spying that the sons of Bhanda had come seeking battle with them, they reported the matter to their Queen Lalita. The ever nine-year old Devi, Bala-Tripurasundari, who always resides at the lotus feet of her Queen mother Lalita, well-versed in all the Sastras and worshipped by all the Shakti-chakras, and like unto her mother Lalita in beauty of form and mien, now rose up to the occasion and spoke to Sri Devi thus:

O Mother! I hear the great eager cries of Bhanda's sons courting battle. I am keen on taking up their challenge. If you will permit me, I shall go and engage them. A mother always allows her child to play in the fields. Allow me now, O Mother of the Worlds, to play on the battlefield; for my arms are itching for action." To this request Sri Devi replied, "Why child! You are so young. How can I send you to the battle-field to fight with the thirty mighty sons of Bhanda? You have only recently learnt the art of using weapons of war. Besides I cannot remain without you even for a moment. You are my only daughter. There is Syamala and there is Dhandini with all their great experience in war. Leaving them, how can I send you along, so tender, to face demoniacal heroes who are strong and cruel in their deeds?" But Bala was very persuasive and, at last, succeeded in obtaining her Mother's permission and blessings. Embracing the daring daughter to her heart with great love, Lalita gave her blessings, and equipped her with the best celestial armour bow arrows and other weapons. Bala Devi rode on her chariot drawn by hundred swans while Deva Kinnaras sang her praises and wished her speedy success. Without the slightest fear of danger, she entered the battle field followed by her Shakti-armies.

Syamala and Dhandini approached Bala Devi and began to reason with her again with a view to send her back safely to her mother. They said to her: "Is it fair Oh young princess, for you to make war personally while we are all here to protect you? How did the Mother of the three worlds, agree to send you thus to do this fierce battle? So saying, they made humble obeisance to her and requested her to desist. But Bala Tripurasundari spoke to them also as she had done to her mother and filled their hearts with pride and joy. Then Syamala and Dhandini stationed themselves on either side of Bala-Devi and followed by their armies, they rushed out of the gateway on the southern wall of fire to the great surprise and astonishment of the startled danava sons. There followed a tremendous resounding noise from both the sides, and soon a terrific battle began. Bala ordered her charioteer to charge right into the midst of the thirty sons of Bhanda and, on nearing them, she sent shower after shower of arrows covering all the sons of Bhanda. Not a single

weapon of the Daitya sons could approach her; for she was quick as lightning; and her weapons were both offensive and defensive in their action. Syamala and Dhandini, who had been ever ready to help Bala, now withdrew to a distance, being satisfied that their Princess needed no rescuer or helper and that she could manage the foes single-handed. News was also sent to Lalitamba every now and then informing her of the daring deeds of Her daughter. On the second day of the battle, Bala fought single-handed and covered up the thirty sons of Bhanda with wondrous weapons of war. Seeing the vast forces of Bhanda, Bala took up Narayanastra and sent it flying over them; when Lo'. the greater part of the two hundred akshouhinis of Bhanda's sons lay slain in battle to the joy of the devatas. The thirty sons of Bhanda were roused to very great wrath and they waged a terrific war sending deadly weapons incessantly. Bala, however, took up a bunch of thirty deadly arrows and let them fly on to the thirty sons of Bhanda with a prayer to her Mother Lalita and with an ardent wish to do good to the three worlds by beheading the thirty danava sons simultaneously. The thirty arrows flew unhampered and carried away their thirty heads; while the bleeding bodies fell to the ground to the great joy of the devatas and Shakti hosts. Syamala and Dhandini who had been eye-witnesses to her great and wondrous prowess and success now embraced her and took her back to their Queen to whom they related her great and mighty achievements. Lalita embraced Her daughter most lovingly and seating her on her lap, stroked and caressed her body and kissed her in great joy'.

BHANDASURA'S LAMENTATION

HAYAGRIVA : On hearing the unbelievable bad tidings of the death of all his thirty sons at the hands of a mere girl of nine years, Bhandasura was cowed down with grief and burned with wrath and hate for his foes. with stifled voice and choking throat he bewailed the loss of his precious sons: "Ha! my beloved sons! Alas! where are you? Ha! my brave and mighty offspring! Ha! the lotuses of my heart! Ha, the apples of my eyes! Ha! my descendants who will never be! Even the hosts of devas feared to face you and trembled before your prowess! O ye, handsome sons, whose very appearance sent cupid's arrows into the heart of every damsel! Where are you now? Why don't you appear before me for once? Please do show me your handsome faces, but once. Is it fair for all of you to leave your father here, lonely, and get away to Vira-Swarga? Without you my kingdom is nothing. my relatives and friends cannot fill your place in my heart; even the people are naught without you; my ministers and this durbar hall have all become strange without your presence. Alas! why have you gone to heaven without me? And one chit of a girl has separated you all from me, and put an end to my family-line and geneology. What play of jealous fate is this? What heinous crimes have I committed in life that I should today meet with this bereavement and shame? What evil Karma of mine is dogging my steps and bringing punishment on my sons too? The very same devas who used to run from your path with fright have now witnessed your down-fall at the hands of a girl; and are elated and overjoyed at your shame. Alas! What can I do? All the wealth of the three worlds is nothing to me any more without your smiling faces; nor can I smile any more in this life! The good self-effort or Karma of my previous lives alone was responsible for your being born as my sons. I was lucky in that. With you all in heaven now, I am as good as dead here on earth. I am undone; I am lost" So

saying, and shedding hot tears, he swooned and fell to the ground. Seeing their Lord and master falling down from his high throne, Visukra, Vishanga and Kutilaksha sprang to his side, sprinkled cool water on his face and fanned it to bring him around. When he came to, Vishukra spoke to him thus "O King, why dost thou lose courage and lament like an ordinary man? Thou knowest that thy sons are now happy in danava-heaven, having earned its enjoyment by the strength of their shoulders and by dying while fighting bravely. Is it not the coveted end of every brave? That is the path every one of us must tread one day. Can death's veil be removed by lamentations?"

Hearing this, Bhandasura set aside his grief for his lost sons and rose up. With hate, wrath and cruelty flaming from his red eyes, he took out his dagger and turning it round and round most dexterously vowed to cut the damsel to pieces before joining his relations and friends. So saying, he started to move to the battle-field; but his brother and commandant stopped him, saying: "Oh Lord! It is not at all necessary for thee to go to kill a woman while we are here. We shall do that for thee. We can drink the ocean dry and swallow the mountains in one gulp. What then is a woman to us? We can turn the worlds topsy-turvy. Permit us now, and we shall do the needful immediately". Listening to their words full of pride and ahankara, Bhanda said "Why so many of you against one woman? It is sufficient if Visukra alone goes. He can throw the Vighna Yantra among the Shakti-armies and make the Shakti forces unwilling to do battle. That is as good as sure victory for us."

VISUKRA THROWS THE JAYA-VIGHNA-YANTRA

Visukra vowed that he would lie unseen to the ranks of the Shakti armies and paralyse the Shakti hosts with indolence and sleepiness and unwillingness towards effort. He immediately ascended his Maya Chariot and, becoming invisible, sped away in the direction of Lalita's war camp. No sooner had Visukra departed than the sun began to set again and Sandhya proceeded to Patala. The stars innumerable sprang into view in the firmament. The ensuing darkness was a good ally to Visukra in his deadly mission.

Arriving at Lalita's camp, he was surprised and disappointed at first seeing the high fence of flame surrounding it. However, he went around the fence keeping at a respectable distance from it and soon he espied the opening on the southern side. As he approached the gate with intent to enter it he discovered that the opening was well guarded by powerful Shaktis and twenty akshouhinis headed by Sthambini Devi. Finding that entry was practically impossible, Visukra started preparing the Jaya-Vighna Yantra, remaining at a distance from the flaming fence. He inscribed the powerful Yantra on a slab of stone, put eight samhara sulas at its eight corners and invoked the devatas (1) Alasa (2) Krpana (3) Dina (4) Nidra (5) Tandra (6) Pramilika (7) Kliba and (8) Nirahangkara at the tips of the eight Tridents, pronounced appropriate mantras and worshipped it with powerful incantations. He then sacrificed cows and goats as per the rules of the prescribed ritual. Then taking the mighty Yantra in his hefty hands, he threw it with all his might; so that it flew over the flaming fence and fell into the midst of the Shakti armies. Immediately the Shakti damsels became tired and began to yawn, grumble and revolt with insubordination.

They threw away their weapons, unwilling to fight any more. Some among them said: "Why fight for victory against the rakshasas and kill them unnecessarily? Why incur sin by himsa of other pranis? Let us all refuse to fight. What is it that we gain by victory? Why should we bother to avenge the devas and suras? Who is our boss? Why should we serve anyone? It is our wish to serve, or not to serve. Who can force us to serve against our will? Who is Lalita? Who is Kameswara? Who is Dhandini? Who is Chandika? Who is Mantrini? Why should we sacrifice our lives for their sake? What do we gain thereby? Let us not fight any more. No more war for us. No more! Effort only drives away luxury, happiness and enjoyments. Sleep, on the other hand, gives comfort and rest and happiness. Laziness is a wonderful and joyful experience! Delay is enjoyable. Why worry? Why make effort? Let us throw down all our weapons and relax and enjoy restful and lazy sleep. What can our Queen do to us? How can she punish us if all of us join together and strike work unitedly?"

Thus, with confused minds, the Shakti damsels threw away their weapons and lazed in indolence with insolence.

After Visukra had thrown his powerful Jaya-Vighna-Yantra into the midst of the Shakti-hosts, he returned to Sunyakapuri with intent to successfully invade at midnight Lalita's stronghold - now rendered ineffective by his Yantra. He gathered together, around him thirty akshouhinis and, at dead of night, reached the flaming fence and blew his trumpets calling the Shakti hosts to meet him in battle. Not a damsel stirred in reply. They lazed and behaved as though they were unconcerned. They wre not going to fight anymore for anybody's sake. They had laid down their weapons and with them, their jobs too. Syamala and Dhandini, seeing that they could not rouse them to action, conferred in private thus: "What has come over our armies now? Why are they indolent, sleepy, insoletnt and prone to insubordination? Who is responsible for this state of affairs? They heed not our words; nor do they worship our Queen Lalitamba. They refuse to take up arms. What could the reason be? Thus discussing, they decided to take the matter to the notice of their Queen.

Said Syamala to Sri Devi: "Parameswari, we know not why, but our Shakti armies are unwilling to fight the foe. They say it is himsa to kill. They have ceased to obey our orders; nor do they worship Thee. They are lazing about and inviting sleep and indolence. They are not skillful with their arms any more; for they have thrown them away in disgust. They abuse us and call us all sorts of names. They say " who is Mantrini and who is Dhandini to us?" Our armies are thus indolent and insolent; outside, the danava chief has laid siege and is calling us to war or to surrender. They are blowing their trumpets haughtily. Please tell us what we can do under the circumstances." Lalitamba beheld the Rakshasa's Maya in her mind and decided to trample down his pride. She turned her face to Lord Kameswara and, amorously looking into His eyes, smiled sweetly at Kameswara and he smiled back at her with divine intent and, to the joy of devas, from the junction of the two radiant sacred smiles was born Maha Ganesa. His head was that of a mighty elephant; and his body was red, surpassing the petals of Japa flower. In his ten powerful hands he held a club, a rosary, a sugar-cane bow, a trident, a lotus, noose, an Utpala, a jewel

- studded pot and a discus. He was pot-bellied and wore the crescent-moon on his head. He was most handsome and radiant with Siddhi and Kirti by his side.

MAHA GANESA DESTROYS VIGHNA YANTRA

Maha Ganesa prostrated before his mother Lalitamba and awaited Her orders. Sri Devi smiled on him with affection and said: " Oh Son! Look at our armies. They have been rendered worthless through the power of the great Jaya-Vighna-Yantra. Go forth and destroy it so that we may subdue the danava hosts who are even now raising a deafening din outside our aates."

Maha Ganesa hastended with all speed and espied the great Jaya-Vighna-Yantra pregnant with powerful mantras and bearing the eight devatas of:

Alasa

Krpana

Dhina

Nidra

Thandhra

Pramilika

Klıba

and Nirahangkara

Taking up the Yantra with his mighty trunk, Mahaganesa chewed it to powder between his powerful teeth to the joy of the devas. He then burnt it all to ashes along with the eight devatas tied to it. No sooner was the enchantment of the Yantra and its attendant devas destroyed than the Shakti damsels woke up from their torpor as if rising from a hypnotic sleep and, taking up their arms, loudly roared in reply to the din of the danavas and got ready for battle, forgetting their previous convictions. Maha Ganesa also created fully armed numerous warrior-ganas with elephant heads like unto himself. They were all full of tejas, each capable of drinking up the seven oceans. There were six mighty leaders by name:

untold injuries and slew millions of danavas. There was a veritable massacre indeed! Vishukra and his armies were really taken unawares and surprised; for they had expected something different to happen in view of Vishukra's Jaya-Vighna-Yantra. Recovering soon from his surprise and looking at the massacre of his danava armies, he grew very wrathful and exerting his might, let fly arrows and sastras. Soon there was quite a din of elephants,horses, chariots etc. But the danavas were losing fast; and they began to flee; they were however caught and slain mercilessly. Vishukra then sent Gajasura with seven akshouhinis to charge into the ranks of Heramba's armies; and these also were soon vanquished by Maha Ganapati's warriors.

Becoming aware of Ganeswara's great and invincible might, Vishukra left the battle-field and escaped to Sunyakapuri in haste; while Maha Ganapati soon despatched Gajasura to Yamapuri and slew his entire armies. With a mighty roar of victory, Maha-Ganapati returned to his mother Lalitamba, who was well pleased with his might and achievments in destroying the Jaya-Vighna-Yantra as well as routing Vishukra and his armies. Lalitamba gave a boon to Ganasa stating that no devapooja would be fruitful unless Ganesa was first invoked and worshipped, and no effort would succeed without Ganesa's help being first sought for.

VISHUKRA AND VISHANGA SLAIN

HAYAGRIVA CONTINUED:

Bhandasura bent his head in shame at the news that Vishukra had run away from the battle-field while all the shakti damsels laughed with scorn. Recovering, however, from this ill-mood, he called again unto him his two brothers Visukra and Vishanga and roused their courage and wrath against Lalita and her damsels by appropriate words of praise and pride.

Visukra gathered around him four hundred akshouhinis; and besides his brother Vishanga, he was also accompanied by Ulukajit and his brothers-the sons of Bhandasura's sister Dhumini. Bhanda himself had taken pains to give military training to his nephews and made them mighty warriors. The conjoint strength of all these great heroes could uproot the three worlds. The devatas became frightened at this combined strength and trembled to think of their fate or to anticipate the result of the war. Even the Shakti hosts became timid at the approach of this mighty danava concourse against them. Though inwardly fearful, they put up a brave front and answered the call of their chiefs, Dhandini and Mantrini without hesitation. Soon, there was an exchange of arrows following the blowing of the trumpets on either side signifying commencement of battle. Mantrini Syamalamba rode on her Geya-chakra chariot while Dhandini Varahi came riding on her Kiri-Chakra Chariot bringing back courage and strenght to the Shakti armies. Devendra and his devatas, watching them go to war, grew bolder and more confident of success, while Munis pronounced blessings, Gandharvas sang praises and apsaras danced before them. Both Syamala Devi and Dhandini Devi looked equal to one another in splendour, prowess and pomp. Mantrini, as Prime Minister, wore a ring of authority given by Lalitambika. Drawing their bow-strings and releasing them, they both created a peculiarly fearful vibration which brought courage to the Shakti-damsels while making the danava

hosts tremble with fear. Approaching the scene of the battle, both Mantrini and Dhandini released showers of arrows on the enemy lines injuring and slaying millions of them. Dhandini Devi charged at Vishanga and hit him with her Club; while Mantrini rushed at Vishukra and hit him likewise. This was a challenge. Soon there followed an exchange of blows and weapons of war between the main leaders on either side, most fearful to behold. Horsemen met horsemen, elephant-riders fell on elephant-riders on the opposite side and chariots charged on to chariots. Thus each side met its equal on the other. As for the great warrior-nephews of Bhandasura, Aswaruda Devi engaged Ulukajit; Sampadesi attacked Purushan; Mahamaya met Kuntisesha; while Unmatha Bhairvari fell on Malatha;Kusurena was attacked by Laghusyama, while Swapnesi charged at Mangalaksha; Vagwadhini fell upon Drughana; Chandakali attacked Kollata. Also the Shakti akshouhinis fell upon the Danava akshouhinis; and the battle on this third day of war grew to be greater and more fierce than that of the previous two days. The Shakti damsels, full of energy, excelled the danavas and slew them right and left; while the danavas; grew weaker in strength and numbers. Watching this state of affairs, Vishukra became wrathful and desperate and, to save the situation, he released the Trushastra on to the Shakti-hosts causing thirst. Instantly there were mysterious fires all over the Shakti ranks, and they began to be scorched inwardly. Their senses began to smart, their limbs became weak; their throats dried up, their cheeks shrivelled; their jaws sagged and their bodies burned with fever. Many fell to the ground unable to bear the thirst, and their glazed eyes protruded. In short, the Shakti damsels lost their beauty and became ghastly and pitiful to look at. Mantrini and Dhandini Devis conferred together with a view to end this sudden disaster. After a prolonged deliberation Mantrini advised Dhandini to send for Madira Sindhu who resides on one of the seven tiers of Kiri-chakra itself. Obeying Mantrini's advice with alacrity, Dhandini Devi immediately sent for Madira Sindhu.

MADIRA SINDHU CAUSES SURAVRISHTI

With blood-red-eyes, ornamented with garlands of golden lotuses, Madira Sindhu prostrated before Dhandini and enquired of her what she wanted him to accomplish. She bade him look upon the suffering armies of Shaktis and ordered him to save them by sending them different varieties of drinks so that they may soon revive and be once more full of strength and energy so as to fight the danavas. Madira Sindhu beheld the pitiable state of the Shakti damsels and also how the danavas, taking advantage of their weakness, were slaying them on all sides. He immediately expanded his body and, in a moment, caused showers of tasty and fermented drinks. There were crores and crores of streams pouring into the midst of the Shakti armies in a myriad streams. The Shakti damsels avidly drank up the wine and were soon seen dancing and jumping with glee. Their jaws sagged no more, and their limbs and senses returned to normal. Even the fallen damsels recovered and rose to do battle again. Some who drank in excess, embraced other dancers as lovers would, and danced with ecstasy. Having thus accomplished his task successfully, Madirasindhu returned to Dhandini Devi and wished her to behold the damsels now. Dhandini was most pleased at him for saving the situation so smartly. *She gave him many a boon.* She ordained that he would be present at every Vajapaya Yajna where

wine purified with Mantra will be used in future in his honour; also, only those who drank wine thus purified and offered would obtain siddhi and not other drinkers; also Bhargava, Mahesi and Maheswara and Balarama would drink wine quite often and so also Dattatreya. Even ordinary people will celebrate,partaking of wine in every Yajna; and wine, thus purified and worshipped, will give them all siddhis. After thus honouring Madirasindhu, Dhandini spoke to Mantrini and told her that she may now send the damsels back to war at will; for they will now be more than equal to the task. So the battle raged again between the two sides; and once more the damsels excelled the danavas in courage, skill, strength and speed, thanks to the wine working in their refreshed and renewed bodies. The devas became glad and again hopeful of success.

Dhandini Devi destroyed a hundred akshouhinis and Mantrini another half a hundred. Aswaruda and others well fed with wine, despatched Ulukajit and his brothers to Yama's abode, and then destroyed another one hundred and fifty akshouhinis.

By this time, the *third day of battle also was coming to a close,* for the sun began to descend beyond the hills of the west. As the darkness began to fall like a curtain on the battle-field, Vishukra grew in prowess and showered sharp arrows on Syamalamba with intent to slay her forthwith. But Sachivesani shattered his arrows and smashed his great bow into two and, without giving him a chance to arm himself again, she slew his charioteer, and cut down his standard with a shower of hundred arrows. Then with an astra equal unto the head of Brahma himself, she severed visukra's head from his body speedily, to the wonder and joy of the devas.

Dhandini covered up Vishanga with her arrows and hit him with her musala-rod, but Visukra's brother was undaunted. He pounced upon Dhandini with his mighty club. Soon, they were seen fighting a duel with clubs, roaring like two wrathful lions. Their bodies were covered with blood and they fought on far into the middle of the night. Then, suddenly, finding an opening, Varahi entangled her halayudha around the neck of Vishanga and dragged him down from his chariot. Vishanga, feeling ashamed to call himself a man or to live any longer after this humiliatory treatment, gave up his ghost and fell to the ground along with his battered chariot.

Thus the third day's war ended. Dhandini and Mantrini spent the rest of the night on the battle field itself along with their Shakti-armies and, when the morning dawned, hied unto their Queen and reported their victory to her for receiving her approbation and blessings.

SRI LALITA FIGHTS BHANDASURA

AGASTHYA :

O Hayanana! Mahaprajna! Thou hast been very kind to me in describing how Mantrini and Dhandini vanquished Visukra and Vishanga so adroitly. I now desire to hear the manner in which Sri Devi defeated Bhandasura. What did the latter do when he heard of the death of his brothers and nephews who helped him in the fray after the death of his sons and near and dear? Kindly relate all this to me, O Lord.

HAYAGRIVA: O Khumbhaja! I shall relate to you, in detail, the battle that raged between Bhanda and Lalitambika. Whoso, listens to it will be freed from sins and will have all desires granted. He who reads of Lalita's deeds with deep devotion and faith will reap a rich reward not only in his life-time but even after.

The news, that his brothers and nephews had all shared the same fate as his thirty sons and other great commandants and chiefs, filled Bhandasura with despair. With dishevelled hair and tear-filled eyes he lamented his loss and bemoaned his evil fate. Comforted, however, by Kutilaksha's words and sighing again and again, he said: "O Kutilaksha! Whichever dame or damsel is responsible for the death of my brothers, I shall now make her pay for it with blood issuing from her own cut-throat. With her blood alone shall I cool the agonising flame due to the bereavement of my sons and brothers. Get ready our armies! " So saying he roared like unto an angry lion and, putting on his armour, twanged his mighty bow-string so loudly as to make the three worlds tremble. Rushing out of his Sunyakapuri, he was joined by his armies uder great and proud chieftains.

Kutilaksha followed by thirty five able leaders, moved towards the battle field looking like veritable wrath-personified. While twenty four danava chiefs armed to the teeth and two thousand one hundred and eigthy five akshouhinis follwed behind Bhandasura to the field of war, Sunyaka Nagara was left with only female population to take care of it.

Bhandasura rode on a chariot drawn by a thousand yoke of lions and wore a Khadga (dagger) equalling Kalagni. His armies were so numerous that, finding no place to move on the grounds, some moved in the air mingling with the dust raised by the fast movement of the heavy chariots and other vahanas; and some rode on the shoulders of others as in a circus performance. As the vast ocean of armies neared the camp of Lalita, Bhandasura let out a terrific roar bursting the skies and the three worlds with tremendous vibration. As his armies also joined in, the roar increased in pitch and vehemance so that the oceans became waterless; the sun and the moon fled from the firmament; stars fell down in their millions; the earth quaked and trembled continuously; the directions were filled with mad fright, the devatas swooned away and the Shakti armies were horrified and filled with great terror. Even the flaming fence around Lalita's armies cooled and died down for a moment, though again it rose high and bright. The twang of Bhanda's bow-string added to the terror of the good populace.

Lalitambika Herself now set out to meet Bhanda in battle, for She knew that none else would be competent to stand against him. Amidst enthusiastic shouts of victory from the devata-hosts who had but a litte-before recovered from their swoon, Lalita shone with all Her weapons bright with white flames scintillating from them.

She rode on Her mighty, holy Chatur-veda Sri-Chakra Chariot of nine tiers protected by powerful yoginis and bedecked atop with Ananda-Dhwaja (flag). It was ten Yojanas in height and four yojanas in width, striking terror in the ranks of the danavas. Behind Sri Devi's chariot came Geya and Kiri-chakra chariots, bearing

Syamalamba, and Dhandini. Behind them marched armies of Shaktis riding on vahanas like Nrisimha (man-lions) camels, horses, elephants, eagles, tigers, birds etc. As they approached the gate of the flaming fence which was only one yojana in width Jwalamalini widened it so that Sri Devi's chariot and Shakti hosts passed through with ease. As Sri Devi passed the gateway and entered the field of battle, there rang victory-bells and Jayabheris and deva-dundubhis. Celestial flowers rained from the firmament, and many a good portent became visible. These signs of sure fortune and success filled the Shakti hosts with great joy; and the damsels eagerly looked forward to wage war with the danavas; on the other hand, into the ranks of the danavas rained blood as an evil omen for them; near them the jackals howled, kites and crows rested on their flag staffs; bones fell in their midst. In spite of these ill forebodings Bhanda, filled with ahankara, ordered his armies to charge into the Shakti-hosts. Heaving like an ocean and bellowing and raising a frightful din, the danava warriors fell on the damsels with their deadly weapons. Undaunted, these damsels sprang upon the onrushing rakshasas and cut them to pieces. Wave after wave of danavas fell upon the Shakti armies with the same result and, very soon, Lalita's forces made a lightning charge into the danava ranks, slaughtering them right and left and filling the battle-field with maimed and dead bodies. There flowed streams of blood all over, while springs of blood spouted from be-headed and maimed bodies of danavas and their vahana-animals, sprinkling the air with droplets of blood; so much so, that neither the sky nor the air, nor ground, was visible for the blood. Thus the battle raged between the two sides till this fourth day of battle was far advanced. Sri Devi now advanced to oppose Bhandasura; and there was an inspiring exhibition of exchange of astras and sastras between them. Bhandasura, filled with pride and wrath born of sorrow, bereavment and desperation, though welling up with great ahankara because of his greatness and prowess, indomitable, on the one hand, and Sri Devi calm and smiling on the other was a sight for the gods only!

As if playing in field with pyrotechnics, Lalitamba let loose an arrow in such a mysterious way that though it appeared as one near her bow, as it moved away, it became often different kinds; in the sky it was of a hundred kinds; on nearing the danava armies there were a thousand kinds and at last, on striking the danavas, there were a crore of them. In great wrath, Bhanda first let fly a shower of arrows and then a sastra known as Andhatha misra on Sri Devi. With a smile, Lalita made it ineffective with a lightning-like Maha-tharani arrow.

When Bhanda sent Pashandastra, Jagadambika meditated on her Buddhi and cut it with Gayathryastra.

Bhanda sent out Andhakasthra to make the Saktis blind. Sri Devi cut it with Chakchushmatiastra.

Bhanda sent Saktinasastram. Devi Lalita cut it with Visvavaso radhastra.

Bhanda sent Antakastra. Lalita cut it with Maha Mrityunjaya Astra.

Bhanda sent an astra to cause amnesia - Chakresi cut it with Dharanastra.

Bhanda sent Astra of Fear - Devi Lalitá cut it with Abhayankara-Indrastra.

Bhanda sent Astra of fearful diseases. Lalita sent Namatraya Mantrastra.

After Achyuta, Ananta and Govinda had dispelled the diseases with Humkara, they worshipped Sri Devi who blessed them and asked them to cure Her bhaktas whenever they were worshipped, with their mantra of three names. With that intent, taking leave of Sri Devi, they left for their respective abodes.

Bhanda then sent an astra capable of shortening life.

Lalita stopped it with kālasankarshini astra.

Bhandasura grew very very wrathful; and with a mighty intent, sent out Maha Asura Astra; and there arose thousands of mighty and huge bodied danava Lords like, Madhu, Kaitaba, Mahishasura, Dhumralochana, Chanda, Munda, Chikshura, Chamara, Raktabija, Sumbha, Nisumbha, Kalakeya and Dhumra. These terrible danava lords, fully armed with fearful weapons, began to torture the Shakti hosts of Lalita. Unable to bear the tortures of these great and mighty rakshasa Lords, the Shakti damels cried unto Sri Devi to save them all from perishing miserably.

DURGA DEVI BORN

Comforting them with Abhaya Mudra, Sri Devi knit her brows in anger and uttered a wrathful Humkara and Lo! there appeared Devi Durga a cumulative form of the tejas-shaktis of the Trimurtis and all the devatas put together, armed with trident, spear, discus, conch, sakti, bow, arrows, inexhaustible-arrow-sheath and many other wonder weapons. All the organs of her body shone with the effulgence of a thousand suns, and she rode on a mighty lion, followed by her armies. She engaged in battle and destroyed all the danava lords in the same manner as described in Chandika Saptasati. Having accomplished her task, Durga Devi made obeisance to Sri Devi and departed to her abode.

Bhandasura then discharged Muka Sastra to make his enemies dumb. Again with a smile on her face, Sri Devi made it ineffective by sending Vagwadini Astra.

BHANDASURA SLAIN

Bhanda then duplicated and repeated histories of previous Kalpas by creating one by one, mighty danava lords who had made it necessary for Vishnu to repeat his ten avataras in every Kalpa.

He now brought into being the rakshasa Somaka and others who were famed for hiding the four vedas. Sri Devi out of her right thumbnail created the Matsyavatara of Sri Adi Narayana, who soon despatched the danavas Somaka and others.

Bhandasura then let loose Arnavastra whereby a huge ocean came and deluged the Shakti armies. Lalitamba, from Her right index finger nail created Adi Kurmavatar who expanded his body and, lifting the damsels out of the water, drank up all the water.

Bhanda then sent out Hiranyaksha Astra when lo! numerous Hiranyakhas were born, fully armed with clubs and other weapons of torture. While these fell on the Shakti damsels, Sri Devi from Her right middle finger-nail created Adi Varaha Murti white as Kailasa and body diamond-hard, who fought and defeated all the Hiranyakshas.

Filled with great wrath that his opponent was able to beat him every time, Bhanda knit his brows and therefrom were born crores of Hiranyakasipus who began to torture the Shakti damsels as though they were so many Prahladas.

Sri Devi from Her right ring-finger nail, created thousands of Nrisimha Avataras who vanquished all the Hiranya kasipas in a moment.

Bhanda then despatched Balindrastra striking terror into the ranks of the devas as Mahabalis emerged from it one after another.

Lalita from her right little finger nail, produced Vamana Avataras who with their pasas bound up Mahabalis. Bhanda now let loose Haihayastra which produced crores of Karta-Viryarjunas who began to smite the Shakti armies.

Sri Devi from her left thumb-nail sent forth a mighty Parasurama who put an end to them.

With growing wrath, Bhanda made a terrifc Humkara, which brought forth Ravana of twenty arms and ten heads with a thousand akshounhinis; also Kumbha karna, Meghanadha and other rakshasa lords.

Lalita, from her left index finger nail, brought forth Sri Rama and Lakshmana. Sri Rama destroyed Ravana and Kumbhakarna with astras and armies, while Lakshmana vanquished Meghanadha and the rest of the armies of rakshasas.

Bhanda then discharged an astra out of which emerged crores of spies and monkeys each equal unto Hanuman in prowesses, who fell on the Shakti hosts and attacked them fiercely.

Sri Lalita created from her left middle finger nail, Haladhara (Balarama) who destroyed the dwividastra with all the spies born therefrom.

Then Bhanda sent forth Rajasuyastra which produced asura-kings like Sisupala, Dantavaktra, Kasipati, Paundraka, Vasudeva, Rumaka, Sambera, Pralamba, Banasura, Kamsa, Mushtika, Chanura, Putana, Sakatasura and others.

Sri Devi from her left ring finger nail, created Vaasudeva (Lord Krishna) who being of Chaturvyuha (Vaasudeva, Samkarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha) destroyed the danava kings assuming his four forms.

Bhanda then let fly Kalyastra which brought forth Adharmacharas like Andhrah, Pundrah, Murthijah, Kiratas, Sabaras, Hunas, Yavanas and other sinful Dharma-drohis and prani-himsakas.

As they began to fall on the Shakti hosts, Tripura brought forth from her left little finger-nail Kalki Avatara on a flying horse;

Kalki conquered the Adharmic hosts and made them swoon away on the battle - field to the joy of the Sakti damsels.

The Ten Avatara Nathas then made obeisance to Sri Devi and, promising to maintain Dharma and punish Adharma in every Kalpa by repeating these avatars, returned to Vaikunta with Sri Lalita Devi's blessings.

Bhandasura then discharged Maha Mohanastra which made the Shakti armies to faint and swoon.

Sri Devi destroyed the Mohanastra and its effects on her armies by releasing Sambhavastra.

By this time, the fourth and last day of battle was about to end; and the sun was falling beyond Astadri. Without delay, Sri Devi took up the offensive; for she wanted to put an end to Bhanda and his hosts without giving him another chance at astra-prayoga. She therefore sent forth Narayanastra and destroyed all the akshouhini armies of Bhandasura. She followed it quickly with Maha-Pasupatastra which went forth vomiting fire and destroyed the twenty four danava lords and all the relatives of Bhandasura.

Lalita finally sent forth Mahakameswarastra and put an end to Bhandasura himself. Flames of Kalagni from Lalita's eyes went forth and burnt up Sunyaka Nagara with all its populace. Soon, there was nothing left except the land strewn with ashes!

The three worlds were filled with joy at the destruction of Bhandasura. Gone was Bhanda, the terror of the three worlds; gone were Bhanda's cruel brothers and sons; gone were Bhanda's commanders and relatives; gone were Bhanda's hosts and akshouhinis; gone were all his super-men, women and children.

Thus vanished Bhanda who had risen from the ashes of Kandarpa:

The Sakti-hosts beat their kettle-drums in joy and danced and sang praises unto victorious Lalita. The rejoicing devas rained down showers of flowers. Deva-Dundhubis sounded, and cool, scented Vasanta-breezes prevailed. The directions became peaceful; the skies became calm and pure. Deva Gandhrvas sang mangala charanas while Urvasi and other apsaras danced. Devas, Gandharvas, Kinneras, Garudas, Uragas and others all praised Sri Devi's great skill and prowess in war, with great joy.

Tumbura, Narada and Saraswati too sang, playing Jaya-Mangala gitas on their celestial instruments. Vasishta and other Rishis recited Veda Mantras; while others chanted Adharva mantras into the fire of homa.

Followed by all the several devas, rishis and others, Lalitamba started on Her return journey from the battle-field.

Sampatkari Devi was in the fore-front. She was followed by Aswaruda Devi with her celestial Pasayudha and all their respective armies on either side of Sri Devi. Mantrini and Dhandini also followed.

Having thus accomplished her great work in favour of the devas, Sri Lalitamba and Lord Kameswara reached their camp and rested with all their Sakti hosts as the Sun went down Astadri and night advanced.

Whoso readeth this story of the prowess of Sri Lalita with great devotion, hath no fear of war or battle or any struggle whatever. One will be blessed with ashtasiddhi, and will get mukti. This pure Lalita Charitra will destroy all one's sins besides granting all one's cherished desires.

AGASTHYA: "O HAYAGRIVA: Thou hast related to me Parameswari's history so far and I am filled with great joy. I have heard from thee great deeds of Sachivesani and Kirivaktra; my many doubts have been cleared. Tell me now, O Lord, what happened afterwards.

HAYAGRIVA: Oh Munivarya, as the day after the battle dawned, with the Sun again appearing above Udayadri, Devi Lalita went forth into the midst of the wounded Shakti-hosts and looked upon them with kindly smiling eyes; cool and soothing nectarine rays proceeded from Her eyes and rested on all the wounded; when lo! every one of them was healed. Thus having become whole, they all rose in unison and praised their Holy Mother with unbounded love surging from their hearts; then came there to worship Sree Devi Lalita, all the Devas, Brahma, Janardhana, Sankara, Amaras, Surapati, Digpatis, Surya, Sasankas, Siddhas, Sadhyas, Kinnaras, Garudas; Uragas, all Rudras, Yakshas, Aswinis, Muraripu and Dhatru-sankara. All these came in great joy, and worshipped holy Mother Lalita - the para Shákti of Kameswara - with great humility and devotion.

Also came Danujas with Prahlada; and all of them too began to sing the following praises of Sri Lalitambika;

LALITA - STUTI BY BRAHMA AND OTHERS

AGASTHYA: Hayagriva!

O Wisest Lord! I have heard the inspiring history of Mighty Lalita the Queen of the Worlds, so ably and beautifully described by Thee: How She vanquished Bhandasura and saved the worlds by regenerating the worlds from the Kama-Pralaya caused by Bhanda; of how Bala Tripura Sundari vanquished the thirty sons of Bhandasura; of how Syamalamba and Varahi Devi defeated Visukra and Vishanga; of the victorious exploits of Sampatkari Devi, Aswaruda, Nakuleswari, Tiraskarini, Pratyangira and the great prowess of Maha Kameswari, Maha Bhagamalini Maha Vajresvari and the Nitya Devis - not to speak of the other great Saktis so invincible in battle. What did Devi Lalita do after the battle lasting four days, O Lord?

HAYAGRIVA: O Chief of Munis! Listen! I shall relate to thee all that took place after the destruction of Bhandasura and his every creation, bringing great joy to the armies of Devi and great peace over all the three worlds.

No sooner was Bhanda destroyed with all his many hosts, than the devas approached Sri Devi Lalita Kama-Kameswari, accompanied by Brahma, Vishnu,

Siva, Sakra, Dik-palas, Adityas, Vasavas, Rudras, Maruts, Saddhyas, Siddhas, Kimpurushas, Yakshas, Niruti and other Nisacharas, Prahlada and other Mahadaityas - in short, several inhabitants of the three worlds of the globe. They were filled with great joy and, with hearts overflowing with gratitude and love for Sri Devi Lalita, they sang Her praises in the following terms:

LALITA-STUTI

Salutations to Thee, O sole Ruler of the Universe!

Salutations to the spouse of the destroyer of the three cities!

Repeated Saluations to the vanquisher of Bhandasura!

Salutations to Kameswari seated on the left lap of Kameswara!

Thou art the wish-granting gem Chintamani capable of granting all desires!

Unthinkable art thou, of the Form of Waves in Chith,

Superconsciousness - beyond thought.

Veiled in wonder Thyself, Thou createst the varied and wonderful worlds.

Salutations to Thee of the Form of Time named CHITRA NITYA

Thou Grantest Liberation, O Thou with the beautiful crescent moon for a Crest Jewel;

Thy fascinating smile is capable of destroying the veil of Moha-attachment!

As the Supreme Mudra Devi Thou art versed in the art of Sovereignty;

Salutations to Thee, O lover of Mudras;

Thou, of delicate & graceful Form, art the destroyer of Kruraandhaka.

Angered, Thou art the veritable Maha-Kali Herself verily; the chakra organisation of Thy armies being governed by Krodanana Luxmi (Varahi);

Salutations to Thee of the Form of the totality of the Lokas without exception;

Abiding in the midst of Thy six most secret Anga Devis who are Thy body-guards,

Thou art extolled by the six branches of "Sruti" Scriptures!

Resting on Thy Shat-Chakras, Thou slayest the six armies. Salutations to Thee of the Form of six Bhavas, O Lalita! Thou leadest all the Nitya Devis beginning with Kamesvari- Nitya, O Thou of Lotus-eyes!

Thou grantest all desires, O Thou desired of Kama-Sambhu!

Salutations to Thee, O Ruler of Kama-kala!

Thou art of the Form of the three types of preceptors - Deva- Siddha-and Mānava;

Thy brilliance is that of a thousand Suns!

Of intense brightness and filled with mercy!

Salutations to Thee, O Primeval Ruler of all Devas!

Thou art ever attended upon by the eight Siddhis Anima and others. Thou art exalted over the effulgent Sadasiva who is but as Thy couch!

Benign art thou, whose Feet are ever worshipped by the Trinity. Repeated Salutations to Thee of the Form of Savitr of the Worlds; Thou art served by the Matruganas Brahmi and others Beloved of Brahma. Thou releasest the bonds of Brahmanas. Thou art the Queen of Swans, partaking of the nectar of Brahman. Salutations to Brahmeswari, Sri Lalita.

Thou art attended on, by all the Mudra-Devis, Samkshobhini and others;

Thou destroyest all doubts!

This Samsara is a plaything in Thy hands, O thou of Lotus eyes! Ever Salutations to Thee, O Lalita, Mistress of All;

The sixteen Nitya-Kala Devatas,beginning with Kamakarshini, ever attend on Thee. Thou art eternal Thyself- a world of unobstructed mercy & freedom;

Repeated Salutations to Thee with a garland of tender blue lotus-buds!

Drunk with the nectar from Manmatha's Ananga's flowers, Ever served by the Ananga Devis art Thou!

Thou dispeller of inauspicious moods, of the Form of Eternity; salutations to Lalita the destroyer of the ranks of enemies.

Worshipped art Thou by the fourteen Devis Samkshobhini and others- surrounding Thee as a garland of many bright lamps!

Thou wearest the Atma of All, free from delusion

Ever pure and calm, Salutations to Thee!

Surrounded art Thou by the group of Saktis Sarva Siddhi Prada and others

Thy feet are capable of bestowing all the wisdom;

Thou art above all, the goal of all;

Salutations to Lalita who granteth all the Siddhis-

The Devis starting with Sarvajna and others Thy Chariot's one tier have occupied

Thou grantest the desires of all the immortals.

Thou art the Sun savita of all the Worlds! Protect us!

Salutations to Thee, attended by Vasini and other Vaak-Devis

All borne on Thy shining Chariot:

Protect the Universe, O beauteous one, granting boons!

Thou Sovereign! armed with celestial bow, arrows and other weapons;

Thou hast crushed Bhandasura and his many hosts!

Thou Ocean of Brilliance excelled by none other!

Salutations to Thee who hast filled our hearts with joy!

Thou art of the Form of Kamesi, Vajresi and Bhagesi!

Thou art time and beyond time, and able to change all time!

Thou hast made the daitya hosts disappear in entirety

Salutations to Thee, oh Kamala, Spouse of Kamesa!

Residing in the Bindu point, and of the Form of Bindu-Kala; Being the Atma of Brahma, Thou art the effulgence of theGreat- Chidakasa.

Adorned with a great heaving bosom of great and intense power, the grantor of boons, Salutations to Thee;

Ever resting on the lap of Kameswara,

Of the heart of Time, full of Grace and Mercy!

Thou art of the Form of Kali at the end of a Kalpa!

Salutations to Thee that begins a new Kalpa and Granteth one's desires;

Thou art all red as the rising Sun, and cool as the Nectar

With the eyes of a deer on a lotus-like face,

Thou art the basis of all creation and its very vitality;

O Thou Omniscient Devi, be gracious unto us!

Through Thy great power, Thou wert born of Chidagni-

Which Sri Sambhunadha had kindled and maintained.

Invincible in battle, Bhandasura and others-

As thorns to the Worlds, have now been slain by Thee!

All bodies hast Thou now rendered new and fresh O Devi!

-With the rich flow of the nectar of Thy Gracious mercy!

By Thee have all the worlds been filled with happiness and made- to live again (regenerated) O beauteous one!

The Devas and others continued their prayer to Sri Devi Lalita as follows:

"The Secondary Tejas (Projection) of Sri Sambhunadha Lord Siva, is in Sthanvasrama performing tapas having been bereft of his spouse Satidevi. His mind is shut to all Bhoga and enjoyment. Also Kumari Uma, daughter of Himavanta is performing severe tapas because her chosen Lord Shiva had burnt Kandarpa to ashes on her account through the wrathful flame of his third eye. It was out of those ashes of Kandarpa that Bhandasura had risen, O Amba! and Thou hast now destroyed him and saved all of us most mercifully. We now beseech Thee to bring Manmadha back to life. Ratidevi, his wife, is unable to bear her forced widowhood. O Laliteswari! May Manmadha be soon united to his wife Rati through thy tender mercy! United with her Lord again, may Ratidevi regain her former happiness! give them both strength and courage, O Devi, that they may once again proceed to Stanvasrama, and may Manmadha suceed this time in bringing about the wedding of Parvati and Shiva. Their issue, Kumara born of this celestial pair alone, will be able to vanquish Tarakasura who had befriended the late Bhandasura. As per the boon obtained by Tarakasura, Shiva's issue, born through Fire alone, can rid us of him. We salute Thee again and again and await thy pleasure".

SRI HAYAGRIVA:

Thus worshipped by Brahma and other devas and devatas, Sri Devi Lalita saw Ratidevi covered with dust, weeping with unbearable sorrow and praying to Jagadamba for restoration of her Lord who had lost his life in his efforts for the welfare of the devas and the three worlds.

MADANA [Cupid] RISES AGAIN

Full of mercy towards Ratidevi, Sri Devi Lalita looked at her Lord Kameswara with intent to regenerate Kandarpa, and Kameswara in turn turned his loving eyes to Hers and out of the contact of those two creative looks was born Manmadha with the allure and brilliance of his earlier form, two-armed and bearing his flowery bow and arrows and wearing auspicious ormaments as ever before-only looking more fresher and younger and more effulgent in glory and power. In front of his eyes he beheld the wife of his previous life awaiting his return; and he was transported with joy, gratitude and contentment. Ratidevi, in turn, seeing her Lord once more in his former body and brilliance, and wondering at the endless prowess of Mother Lalita Kameswari, was quite literally drowned in an ocean of joy; filled with reverence, she bowed low down in great thankfulness:

With renewed strength and joy, Manmadha worshipped his Mother, Sri Devi Lalita, with unbounded gratefulness and deep devotion, and said: "Though my body had been burnt to ashes by the wrathful flames of Shiva's third eye, Thou hast regenerated it as though nothing had happened to it, O mother: Thou hast given me a new life and, protecting my wife all the while, Thou hast given her also back to me. I am verily Thine own son and servant now. I await to carry out Thine Orders, whatever they may be!

Sri Devi said: "Go now, my son, and fear no more! Through my grace, you shall be able to win over all the three worlds with thy power of delusion (Moha). Even Shiva shall lose his former steadiness at the touch of your flowery arrows and shall hasten to marry Uma to the joy of the three worlds. By my Grace, a thousand crores of Madanas shall emerge from this your new body, and they shall all surround Ratidevi and minister unto her. By my Grace again, Shiva's anger shall no more scorch you, but he will burn, instead, and pine with love for Gowri as soon as your arrow shall touch him. He shall become so enamoured of Parvati and so dread separation from her that he will give her half his body and become known as Ardhanarisvara. So great shall be your might and prowess! Through my Grace, you shall remain invisible to all except Rati. You shall move about the three worlds, unseen, and no one, however bold and powerful, shall be able to withstand the delusive power of your invincible arrows. Should anyone sky-lark with women without your aid, or speak ill of you, you may make him impotent if you will. The evil-minded and sinful folk who abuse, deceive or ill-treat my devotees, shall be lured by you to such women, as should not be approached, and shall thus be punished till they reform. Whereas, to my devotees-ever intent on my worship-you shall grant them their heart's desire and bless their love-life with joy and contentment."

Overwhelmed with joy and thankfulness, Manobhava prostrated before his Mother and, taking leave of Her, prepared to leave for Stanvasrama. In that moment there emanated, from the many pores of his body, millions of handsome youths equal unto him in splendour and proceeded in all direcions to cause delusion (Moha) in the three worlds, to bring about the propagation of species for the welfare and advancement of all the worlds.

With joy welling up in his heart, Kandarpa started on his mission to Sthanvasrama, flanked by his friends: Vasanta, the Lord of the spring season, Peeta-Mardha his lieutenant, the cool full-moon and Malaya-Maruta the sweet-scented breezes. The male Kokila-birds preceded him, singing enchantingly. Ratidevi clasped him tight in her embrace and caressed him with love and happiness immeasurable, all the way, for Ananga was invisible to all except herself.

PARVATI PARINAYAM

Arriving at Stanvasrama, Ananga espied Lord Shiva in Samadhi, but without losing a moment, he let fly his newly blessed arrows at him. At the touch of these powerful arrows, Shiva's mind leaped into activity and was immediately clouded with Moha inducing passion for Parvati; whereupon he left his austere tapas and began to long for Uma and her graceful presence. By the increaing action of Ananga's arrows, Lord Shiva's passion for Parvati also increased in proportion and he was completely overwhelmed by the unbearable separation from her. He longed and pined for her presence and could not stay still. Neither the cool moon-beams nor the ice-cold Ganga-water could comfort him. Nandi, Bhringi, Mahakala and other Chiefs brought many flowers and made his couch cool, soft and fragrant. Nandi lent his hands as a pillow on the flowery couch too, but all to no avail. Even the icy Himalaya was not able to quench the heat of Shiva's passion which began to consume his body as though with fever. Almost distraught with love, he would draw

the form of Parvati with his finger-nail and stare longingly at it. He would spend his days and nights thinking of Uma, speaking of Uma, and listening to tales of Uma only. He urged his attendants to quickly arrange for a meeting with Parvati and to bring about his wedding with her speedily.

Having thus far succeeded with Lord Shiva, Ananga, now turned his attention to Parvati. At the touch of his arrows, Uma, who had been disheartened and burning with shame and frustration at what had happened to her, now became agitated with renewed longing for Lord Shiva. Her pale face was smeared with hot tears. Neither food nor sleep could she welcome. Her many hand-maidens did all they could to comfort and console her and tried to cool her body with many an unguent. Sighing and heaving, sleepless and anxious, Uma spent day after day and night after night in mental agony. Unable to see his daughter suffereing so, Himavanta advised her to practise penance to please Lord Shiva and thus win his favour as a boon. Thus advised, Uma went up the Himalayas and, sitting on the peak named Gowri, began an austere tapas with intent to win Shiva for her Lord, undaunted by cold, heat or sleet. Her great austerity attracted Lord Shiva who hastened unto her with all speed and gave her his darshan. No sooner had Parvati offered to wed him than Shiva accepted her heartily and made haste to marry her instantly according to Vedic ritual. Offered by her father Himavan, with the Sapta-Rishis acting as purohits, the marriage was celebrated amid applause from devas and devatas, and to the joy of the three worlds.

Thus united, Parvati and Parameswara wandered together from one mountain peak to another and from forest to forest on a long honeymoon, each satisfying the hunger for the other's company and proximity. The long separation had at last come to an end and flowered into joy and contentment. After these long peregrinations, they at last settled down at Kailas with Pramadaganas who welcomed them most joyfully. Soon, however, Lord Shiva wished to be once more alone with Parvati, to pour out his abundant love and to share hers.

He therefore set out with Parvati first to Mandaragiri, then to the Vindhyas and then to Himasaila, Malaya, Pariyatraka and many other hills and peaks.

KUMARA-SAMBHAVAM

On an auspicious occasion in uniting with Uma, Lord Shiva released his pent-up heat of passion in Virya-paata. This pure Retas of Maheswara was so unbearably hot that, unable to hold it in her womb, Parvati let it slide to the ground. The latter also, being scorched, rolled it into Fire. The God of Fire carried it to the flaming constellation of Pleides and handed it over to the group of Six Krithika sisters who took fond care of the developing embryo for a while. Soon, however, they were obliged to put it into the cool waters of the Ganges. The latter too, unable to bear the extreme heat, pushed it gently into the Saravana forest where, at last, the baby grew in stature with the six faces glowing like fire. The Ganges then handed over the divine child to Lord Shiva who brought him up most lovingly. Caressed with loving care by his mother Parvati also, Kumara grew up to be a most powerful and

valiant hero. Lord Shiva taught him all the Arts and Sciences, and then installed him as the Commander-in-chief of the devas.

Soon, Kumara was on the battle-field and marching against Tarakasura and his armies. In no time, he slew Tarakeswara and his valiant chieftains; and the devas and devatas were once more freed from the tortures of the danavas. Overjoyed at the destruction of Tarakasura, Indra gave his daughter Devasena in marriage to Kumara; and again there was a wedding celebrated - this time Parvati's son Kumara and Devasena being the targets for Ananga's arrows. Devasena was filled with joy at winning Kumara's love, and they lived happily everafter.

Having thus accomplished his duty of creating happiness all around, while his miriad doubles were busy filling the three worlds with sweet Moha, Manmadha returned to where Sri Devi Lalita was residing in Sri Nagara and, in the cool sunshine of Her benign, smiling, gracious looks, found ecstatic joy!

DESCRIPTION OF MANI DVEEPA OF SRI NAGARA

AGASTHYA:

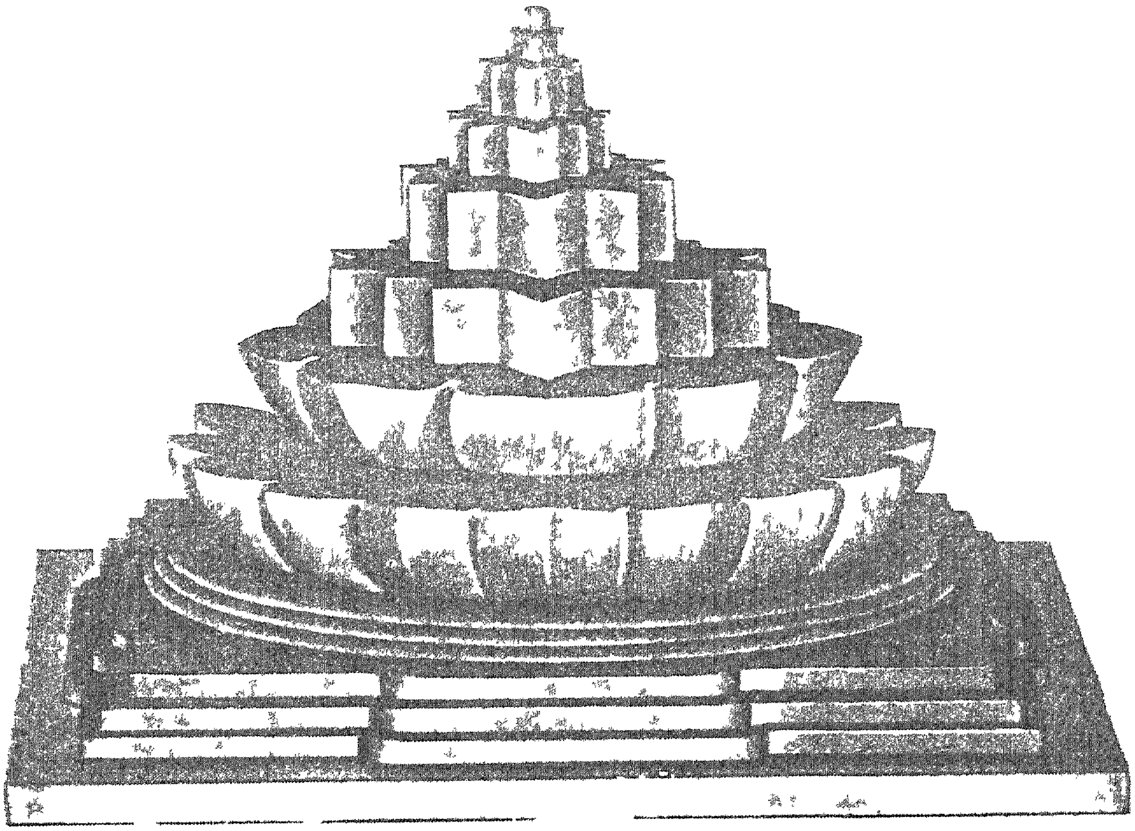
"O Lord Hayanana: Where is this Sri Nagara? Who had built it in the beginning? Kindly describe to me all about it: its extent, grandeur etc. Thou alone art the sun that can dry up all the slush of doubts:

SRI HAYAGRIVA: "O LORD OF RISHIS"! Sri Lalita the grantor of desires of all her devotees by Her mere glance, after having vanquished Bhandasura from her invincible Sri- Chakraraja-Chariot, became the cynosure of all eyes, the target of all praise, the source of all happiness and joy: (Is not "Ananda" the flag of her chariot!). The Trinity as well as Indra and his devas all desired to have Her live amidst them so that they may ever be near Her. She being ever united with Her Lord - Kameswara, could spend the rest of Time in ecstasy! Accordingly, they obtained Sri Devi's permission for the construction of a glorious city, unequalled in all the universe, for Her abode with Kama-Siva in the very place where she had first appeared in the flames of the Maha-Yaga of self-surrender and sacrifice, seated on Her glorious nine tiered Sri Chakra Chariot.

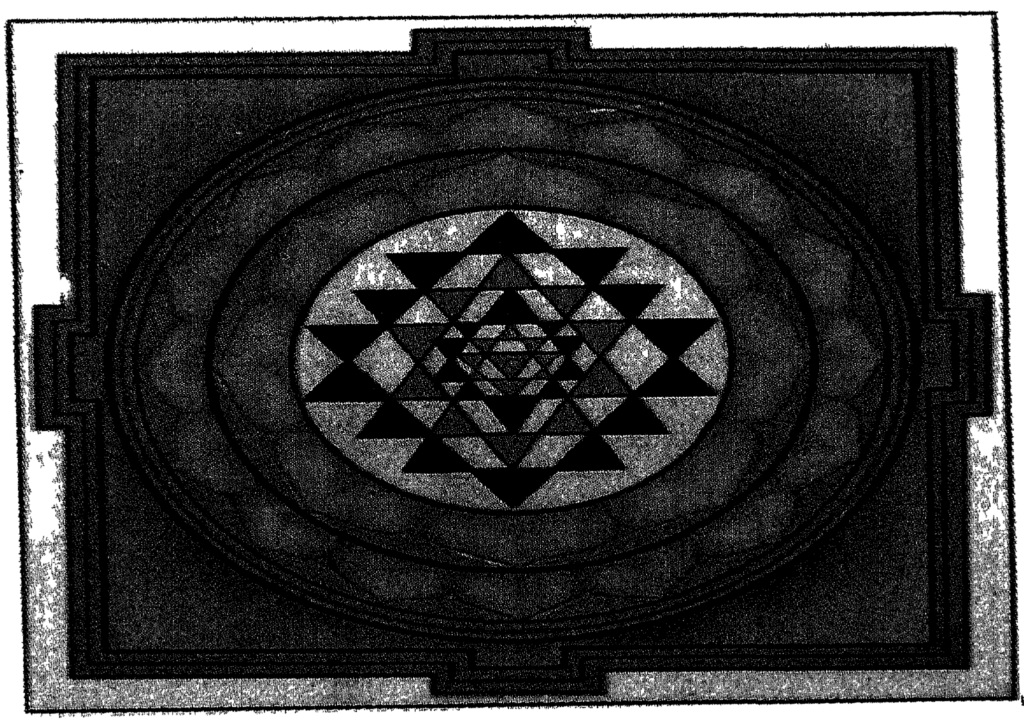
The Trimurtis along with Indra and the devas sent for Viswakarma, the architect of the celestials as also Maya the (mayavic)illusion-creating architect of the asuras and spoke to them sweetly thus, after welcoming them with due respect and love: "Oh ye great architects of the Universe! we desire you to construct a most magnificent city wherein Sri Devi-Lalita Kameswari -may dwell in unison with Lord Kameswara. Her mansion must be situated in the centre surrounded by sixteen enclosing-cities of different gems and metals. The mother manifests herself in sixteen different forms (Shodasi). Hence her abode should also be surrounded by sixteen different enclosures.

Greatly flattered at having been assigned such a mighty task for the Divine Mother's pleasure, and filled with joy and great expectations, Viswakarma and Maya

MERU



SRICHAKRAM



BHUPRASTHARAM



made obeisance to the Trimurtis and said: "Blessed are we for having thus been ordained by Ye, Oh Lords, for such a grand task! Pray, tell us, how the several enclosures and surrounding countries should look like, and their relative positions."

The Trimurtis were pleased at their readiness and thus replied to the wonder-architects in gentle words pleasing unto Sri Devi also: "O Ye great ones! The sixteen celestial cities to be built amid sixteen enclosures shall be named after the sixteen Nitya-Devis of Sri Devi Lalita, for She is of the form of these sixteen Nitya-swarupinis causing limited time and Timeless Eternity. She is the very root of Time; and causes the cycle of seasons, days, years - nay Manvantaras and Maha Kalpas themselves. The sixteen celestial cities may be named thus:

1. Kameswaripuri on Central Meru Mountain
2. Bhagamalapuri on Nishadha Kshetra
3. Nitya klinnapuri on Hemakuta
4. Bherundapuri on the Himalayas
5. Vahnivasinipuri on Gandha Madana Mountain
6. Maha Vajreswaripuri on Neelamesha
7. Sivaduthi
8. Twaritapuri on Mahendragiri
9. Kulasundaripuri on Mahagiri
10. Nityapuri on the Ocean of Salt
11. Nilapatakapuri on the ocean of sugar-cane juice
12. Vijayapuri on the ocean of wine
13. Sarvamangalapuri on the ocean of ghee
14. Jwalamalinipuri on the ocean of curds
15. Chitrapuri on the ocean of milk
16. Mahanityapuri on the ocean of water

You may commence the construction of these sixteen cities on an auspicious moment and exhibit your many unequalled skills, praiseworthy in all the vast universe; As your very thoughts become things, it takes but a short time for you both to materialise your plans and designs!

Maya and Viswakarma once again made obeisance to Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara as also to Indra and other rulers of the boundaries of the universe and set to work in accordance with the directions given to them; very soon, there sparkled Sri Nagara constituting the above mentioned sixteen Nitya-cities amid the celestial enclosures.

Sri Hayagriva then began to relate to Agasthya a full description of Sri Nagara along with their ruling devatas.

SRI HAYAGRIVA: The Meru Kshetra was a thousand yojanas in height, being the axis or base of all the fourteen worlds.

This Meru mountain constitutes four peaks, one in the centre, and three around it in the directions of S.W., N.W. and N.E.; each of these three surrounding peaks is a hundred yojanas in height and another hundred in extent. These three are the abodes of the Trinity! Brahma (Creator) Vishnu (Preserver) and Shiva (Dissolver).

The middle or central peak is four hundred yojanas in height as well as in extent; and it is on this central peak of Maha Meru that Sripura exists, extolled by the great and good ones. How is it possible to describe Sripura and its many parts; Yet, I shall relate to you as much as I have heard, or come to know about it.

The outer enclosure is of iron,with gates opening to the four directions.At every gate are two doors made of iron. Attached to the two doors are two shining bolts. The four gates are thus made secure.

Listen now, O Khumbhaje! to the disposition of the (Gopuras) many storeyed ornamental spires. At each corner, on each side is erected a gopura; there are gopuras on either side of the gates; and in the middle of the area is a mighty gopura of the shape of a lotus. The top most tier of this central gopura is adorned with three crowns. The (Kalasas) crowns were broader at the base and tapered away to the top. The crowns on the gopura erected at the gate are arranged from west to east; at the western gate they are from south to north;at the northern gate as at the sourthern gate, and so also the crowns on the gopura of the eastern gate resembled those at the western.

(i) Inside the Iron-Prakaras lies the *bronze* sala which is akin to the sala of iron in description. The area between the iron & bronze enclosures is filled with *magnificent gardens* and is the store house of all types of life born of seeds. All varieties of trees and plants and creepers etc. bearing delicious fruits and fragrant flowers of all descriptions,and belonging to all the seasons of the year, rousing sringara rasa in the breasts of all men and women. This vatika is termed *nana-Vrksha-Mahodyana-Vatika.*

(ii) *Seven yojanas away* from the bronze prakara and four yojanas higher lies the square-shaped *copper prakara*. The land enclosed by the bronze and copper boundaries is well known as *"KALPAKA VATIKA"* or the abode of the Kalpa Vriksha or Wish-yielding trees. The area between bronze and copper enclosures, called the Kalpakavatika forms the second tier. These plants yield camphor and are adorned with gem like seeds bearing fresh fruits and fragrant flowers with shining gold for bark yielding silks and honey.

(iii) Seven yojanas away from the copper enclosure and four yojanas higher lies the third Kakshya(enclosure)of lead known as the Santana Vatika and consists of trees which have the power to grant children as boon.

(iv) Seven yojanas away from the Lead Prakara and four yojanas higher lies the Prakara of tin.It is bounded by lead and tin walls and is known as *Harichandana Vatika* filled with fragrant sandalwood trees. All the doorways and gopuras and kalasas are akin to the ones in the preceding enclosures.

(v) Seven yojanas from the Tin enclosure and four yojanas in height lies the panchaloha sala enclosing the land known as *MANDARADRUMA* VATIKA fragrant with mandara trees.

(vi) Seven yojanas away from the *Pancha-Loha*-maya sala and four yojanas higher is the *silver* wall enclosing the area known as the *PARIJATA DRUMAVATIKA* brimming with trees yielding fruits and calestial parijata flowers engalore.

vii. Inside, and seven yojanas away again, and four yojanas in height lies the prakara of gold enclosing area known as *KADAMBA TARU VATIKA*. In this enclosure abound *Nipa trees* each two yojanas in height yielding (amrita)nectarine soma. Here resides a Yogini by name *Kadambari,* brimming with blissful joy. This Kadambari is well loved by Mantrini *Devi Syamalamba*.

In the midst of these shady neepa trees, exists the beautiful mandira of Mantrinadha. On the four(S.E.,S.W.,N.W.,and N.E.,) corners of this *Kadambavana Vatika* are constructed four mandiras. Each of these palaces contain seven tiers bounded by Neepa trees on all sides, Sri Syamalamba uses all these mandiras.

SRI NAGARA has been established in the midst of the *forest of lotuses;* and Mantrini's dwelling has been erected nearby so as to help the latter to be in daily attendance on SRI DEVI LALITA. Thus constructed wonderfully,the abode of Syamalamba can be described only by one who is blessed with a thousand tongues. Therein dwell *Matanga Kanyakas* daughters of *Matanga Rishi*, who drunk with the wine of Kadambari and copper eyed - remain singing and playing on the Vinas.

AGASTHYA; Who, O Lord is Matanga Rishi? How did he happen to have those daughters? How did they become able to serve Syamalamba?

THE BIRTH OF MATANGA KANYAKAS

Sri Hayagriva: Hear Oh Munivarya! Matanga Muni was a great yogi whose desire was to be able to create new worlds at will. To this end, he practised severe austerities and deep tapasya and soon was blessed with a magnificent son, ever obedient to his father.

This son, named Maatanga,also practised severs tapas like unto his father, desiring the darshan of Mantrini Devi. Attracted by his great tapas, Syamalamba appeared before him and said:

"O Munivarya: I am well pleased with your great efforts. Tell me what is your desire. I have come to give you a boon."

Joining both his hands in great devotion and bowing to the lotus feet of Syamala Devi, Maatanga said thus:

"Oh Mother! Thou art the grantor of Thy devotee's desires. Devotion to Thy feet will yield *Anima and the other Siddhis* even without asking for them. As thou art well pleased with my worship,and wishing to grant my desires, I am indeed well blessed. O Mother! once, as I was spending days and nights in happiness in the company of my dear friend Himavan, who happened to mention that he was greater than me because of having Gauri as his daughter. O Mother is it not fair that friends should be equal in all respects; if one of them is greater in any particular aspect, the other also will naturally wish to be his equal. it is with this intent that I have thus practised these austerities. My desire is that Thou shouldst be born as my daughter, even as Gouri was born to Himavan. May you become known by my name as Matanga Kanya. To the great joy of Maatanga Mahamuni Syamala Devi uttered the words "So be it" and vanished.

That very night Maatanga's wife Siddhimati had a dream wherein Syamala Devi appeared to her and presented her with a peacock feather, from her ear-oranment.

As a result of the dream, she Soon gave birth to a goddess who was named *LAGHUSYAMA* OR MAATANGI OR MATANGA KANYA. She soon became proficient in the sixty four arts and sciences. By the power of this knowledge Laghusyma was able to create many (crores) Syamalabikas equal unto herself.Thus came into being crores over crores of Maatanga Kanyakas.

Surrounded by these, LaghuSyama soon acquired the status of an *Anga-Sakti to Mantrini Devi.* That is how Kadamba Vatika became the dwelling place of all these Maatanga Kanyakas.

I have now related to you the names of the metal bounded seven vatikas. What more do you desire to hear, O Kumbha Sambhava?

AGASTHYA: O Saindhavananda: Tell me by whom these several metal bounded enclosures are protected.

<u>THE PROTECTORS OF THE SEVEN METAL SALAS</u>

HAYAGRIVA:

Listen O Khumbhaja: The first enclosure going by the name of *Nana Vriksha Mahodyana* is being guarded and protected by *Maha Kala* and *Maha Kali* capable of swallowing all the worlds. He has the colour of blue, nimbus clouds with a fierce mien, wearing black armour,and with red eyes. He sits on his gem-decked throne looking on his spouse Mahakali who returns his looks with her own suffused with love. *Yet his mind is ever in meditation on the Lotus feet of Sri Devi Lalita.* Intent on bestowing long life on all his devotees he is ever surrounded by all the fierce Kinkaras of Kala Mrtyu. The Kala-Chakra (wheel of time) is their abode and the mystery of their might and power is inscrutable. This wheel of Time or Kala-chakra is consisting of Four concentric Avaranas.

In the Centre is the Bindu where resides Mahakala with spouse;and is surrounded,in order, by a triangular and a pentangular courtyard. The latter is bounded by a sixteen-petalled lotus which again is circled by an eight-petalled lotus.

The Triangular Courtyard is occupied by three Mahakala Saktis:

i)
1. Maha Kalpa - (The great preservation period)
2. Maha Sandhya - (great dusk or dawn)
3. Maha Nisaa - (The great Pralaya or night)

ii) In the pentangular courtyard reside:

i) Krta	yuga	(4 parts justice reigns)
ii) Treta	"	(3 do)
iii) Dwapara	"	(2 do)
iv) Kali	"	(1 part justice out of 4)
v) Manvantara	(aggregate of the above Yugas)	

ii. At the five angular points of the Pentagon are:

1) Pratyusha	(dawn)
2) Pratyuprasu	(dusk)
3) Parahna	(forenoon)
4) Aparahna	(afternoon)
5) Madhyahna	(midnoon)

iii) The saktis residing in the sixteen ·petalled lotus are:

1. Diva (day)	2. Nisa (night)	3. Tamisra	4.Jyotsnî
5. Pakshini	6. Pradosha	7. Nisidha	8.Prahara
9. Purnima	10. Reka	11. Anumati	12.Amavasi
13.Sirivali	14. Kuhu	15. Bhadra	16.Uparaga

iv) On the sixteen petals there reside:

1. Kala	2. Kashta	3. Nimesha	4. Kshana
5. Lava	6. Trti	7. Muhurta	8. Kutapa
9. Meta	10. Sukla Paksha	11.Krishna paksha	12.Ayana
13. Vishuva	14. Samvatsara	15. Parivatsara	16.Edavatsara

v) In the eight petalled Lotus, there reside:

1. Idvatsara	2. Eduvatsara	3. Avatsara
4. Tidhi	5. Vaara	6. Nakshatra
7. Yoga	8. Karana	

The four door-keepers of this Kaala-Chakra in the outer enclosure of Nana Virksha Mahodyana are:

1. Kāli 2. Kalya 3. Kalana 4. Kali

All these several Saktis serve Mahakala bearing in their arms a Purna Kumbha of nectar. Their bodies are black and are ever intent in the worship of Sri Devi Lalita.

ii. **BRONZE ENCLOSURE:**

II. ***Kalpaka-Vāti*** between the bronze and copper enclosures.

The protector of Kalpaka-vati is:

VASANTHA

The Lord of (Vasantharithu) spring season. Ever obedient to Sri Devi Lalita, he is full of effulgence. Seated on a throne of flowers, holding in his arms weapons of flowers, ornamented with flowers and sheltered by an umbrella of flowers he is waited upon by his two wives:

Madhusri and

Madhavasri

Gandharvas wander here with their mates, singing and enjoying themselves.

III. ***SANTANA-VATI:*** Enclosed within the prakaras of copper and lead, the Santana-vati is full of Santana-Vrkshas heavy with fruits and flowers.

THE PROTECTOR OF SANTANA-VATI: (Child granting) is the Lord of *Grishmartu* (hot summer season)

Ever obedient to Sri Devi Lalita he dwells with his two wives Sukasri and Suchisri.

Their bodies are garlanded and smeared with the cooling (harichandana) sandalwood paste; siddhas and celestials sit here under the shade of the issue-granting santana-trees.

IV. ***HARICHANDANA VATI*** (Between the enclosures of Lead and Tin)

Filled with sweet scented sandal wood trees this Harichandanavati is being protected by varuna the Lord of Rainy season, effulgent in body, red-eyed with

lightning riding on clouds, wearing a shield made of clouds(as an armour) and holding as bow the gem-studded rainbow. The thunder is the sound of his conch. He is ever intent on worshipping Sri Devi Lalita. He makes the three worlds happy with his rains. He is surrounded by the 12 Saktis:

1. Nabhasri
2. Nabhasyasri
3. Sarasa
4. Sasya malini
5. Ambā
6. dulā
7. Nitatri
8. Abhrayanti
9. Meghayantika
10. Varshayanti
11. Chupunika
12. Vāridhāra

The Lord of the Rainy season blesses the lands of the devotees with timely rain and grains and punishes the enemies of Devi with draught, famine, or floods.

V. ***MANDĀRA - VĀTIKA***

Enclosed within walls of Tin and Panchaloha filled with Mandara Trees this enclosure is governed by the Lord of AUTUMN (SARAT RITU) with his two wives:

Isha Luxmi and Urja Luxmi

all intent on the worship of Sri Devi Lalita. All varieties of Siddha Ganas fill this area and spend their time in bliss.

VI. ***PĀRIJĀTĀ - VĀTIKA***

(between pancha loha and silver enclosures)

Filled with celestial Parijata trees, this enclosure is under the protection of Lord of Hemanta Ritu of great Tejas with a body cool and fair as snow, a face ever benign and filled with peace, and greatly favoured by Sri Devi Lalita, ever meditating on Her and worshipping Her with an abundance of fragrant flowers. He is served by his two wives:

Sahasri and Sahasyasri

They are also surrounded by siddhas and celestial damsels intent on listening to the Lilas of Sri Devi Lalita.

VII ***KADAMBA VĀTIKA***

(between silver and gold prakaras)

Filled with Kadamba trees the Kadamba Vatika is under the protection of the Lord of Winter SISIRA RTU with his two wives Tapasri and Tapasyasri; the entire enclosure is cool and breezy, and there resides Syamala Devi of cool body with her anga devata Laghu Syamala.

Mahāsiddhaganās ever reṣide in this enclosure bounded by walls of silver and gold, ever singing praises of Sri Devi Lalita and rejoicing in great bliss.

AGASTHYA: Oh Gandharva vadhana! Thou hast related to me the seven types of metal enclosures, containing different varieties of gardens and their rulers as well. I have also heard from Thee, in the case of the initial outer garden of all varieties of trees of all seasons, of how Mahakala reigns there and of the four-fold Chakra therein, including the names of the several Saktis occuppying the different tiers of the Chakra surrounding Mahākālā. I have not yet heard from thee regarding the Chakras existing in the other six enclosures beginning with Kalpaka Vatika and the names of the several Saktis residing therein. O knower of all things! kindly enlighten me on these details also.

HAYAGRIVA: Listen Oh Chief of Munis ! I have already described Kāla-Chakra to you. I shall now tell you of VASANTA CHAKṚA. In the Kalpaka-vatika is the Vasanta Chakra of seven āvaranās consisting of Bindu, surrounded by

1. Pentagon
2. Triangle
3. 8 Petalled lotus
4. 16 Petalled lotus
5. 10 Petalled lotus
6. 10 Petalled lotus again and
7. 4 sided square

Lord Vasanta of great tejas dwells at the central Bindu of this Chakra, with both Madhusri and Madhavasri seated on his lap and in his embrace. With two of his four hands he is lovingly caressing his two ladies and in the other two hands he is holding a vessel of blissful wine made from flowers, and a lump of shuddhi. (The wives should be imagined as sitting on his thighs; while in the case of the Lords of the other four seasons the wives should be seen as sitting along side or nearby).

I shall now give you the names of the Saktis in the Vasanta Chakra. There are fifteen Devis, their names starting with Madhusukla as prefix and ending with the tidhis of the sukla paksha. There are thus fifteen Devis again with the prefix

Madhukrishna and ending with the tidhis of the Krishna Paksha; thus we have 30 Devis connected with Madhu Sri. Similarly there are another thirty Devis connected with the name Madhavasri as Madhavasukla-pradhamika upto Madhavasukla Purnima and Madhavakrishna pradhamika to Madhavakrishna Amavasya.

These Devis total sixty and they reside in various parts of the seven avaranas of Vasanta Chakra; and they must be worshipped separately and individually.

The Chakras of the other seasons are also similar to Vasanta Chakra; the 60 Devis there are also similarly named with the appropriate prefixes. They are not enumerated here to avoid unnecessary rapetition. They worship Sri Devi Lalita daily; the number of devatas in these six other Chakras is thus 60 x 6 = 360.

Thus has been described by me the seven metallic enclosures together with the Chakras and their Devatas. Blessed is the man who recites the several names of all these Devas and Devis.

I shall now describe to you the still remaining inner enclosures, together with the names of the Devas and Devis residing in them.

DESCRIPTION OF RATNA - SALAS

SRI HAYAGRIVA:

I. ***PUSHYARAGHA*** - MAYA SALA ***(SIDDHA LOKA)***

Seven yojanas away from the Prākāra of Gold, and four yojanas in height is prakara built of Kanaka Pushya Raga gems. Within this enclosure dwell Siddhas and Siddha damsels in great ecstasy,ever in contemplation of Sri Devi Lalita and ever-ready to assist Her devotees.

The doorways and gopuras of these Ratna-Salas are similar to those of the previously described metallic salas except that these are of gems while the others are of metals only. Even the land enclosed by the golden wall on this side and Pushya Raga Manimaya wall on the other is resplendent with reddish glow as of Pushya raga gems. There are beautiful birds flying along crystal-clear streams and resting or singing on gem yielding trees;people who have become Siddhas occupy this enclosure by virtue of their mantrasādhana of Devi having freed themselves from Ahankāra and Mamakāra.

II ***PADMARĀGA MAYA SALA*** (RUBY)

(Charana Loka)

Seven yojanas from the Pushyaraga Maya Sala and four yojanas in height is Padmaraga Maya Sala, inhabited by people of Charana Loka; Day & night the Charana damsels spend their time in blissful existence, ever in contemplation of Sri Devi Lalita.

III ***GOMEDHIKA PRĀKĀRA***

(Yogini & Bhairava - Loka)

Inside Padmaraga Prakara, seven yojanas away, and four yojanas in height is Gomedhika Sala peopled by crores of Yoginis and Bhairāvas worshipping Parameswari Kala Samkarshini.

IV ***VAJRA PRAKARA (Deva-Yoni-Loka)***

Seven yojanas from Gomedhikasala and four yojanas in height lies Vajra Sala, the intervening enclosure also being of diamonds within which dwell 14 types of Gandharvas and Apsara ganas singing praises of Parameswari. They are of the form of Kandarpa & beautiful beyond description. Rambha, Menaka, Urvasi, Alambusa, Manjughosha, Sukesi, Viswachi, Tilothama also dwell there devoted to Sri Devi Lalita.

Also therein dwell the 14 fold Apsaras ever worshipping Sri Devi.

AGASTHYA having requested Hayagriva to narrate the names of the 14 sources of Apsaras the latter enumerated them as follows:

APSARAS BORN FROM;

1. Brahma's mind

2. Kāma

3. Mrtyu

4. Urvi

5. Mārutam

6. Sun's hot-rays

7. Moon beams

8. Vedas

9. Pāvaka

10. Vidyut

11. Amrita

12. Daksha Kanya Muni

13. Daksha Kanya (Arishta)

14. Water.

Fairies are born from the above-mentioned 14 sources.

Kinnaras and Kimpurushas dance and sing in praise of Sri Devi Lalita and are ever intent on Her Great Mantra. In this enclosure is a river of diamonds. Devi's devotees partake of the waters of this Diamond river and acquire a long life free from illness. Also, it was here that Indra performed tapas when his Vajrayudha failed to injure or hurt Bhandasura and was lost. He was presented with another Vajrayudha by Devi who was pleased with his Tapas.

(V) ***VAIDURYA SALA***

(DĀNAVA - HEAVEN)

Seven Yojanas towards the interior of the Vajra-sala and four yojana in height lies Vaidurya Sala. The inhabitants of Pātālaloka, after acquiring merit through Devi-Mantrajapa, arrive here and dwell in bliss. Such are: Sesha, Takshaka, Sankhachuda, Vāsuki, Mahāpadmamukha and their relations and even Maha-Ruksha dwell here, ever in worship of Sri Devi Lalita. Rivers and streams cold to the touch flow here adorned by lotuses and swans. There are dwelling places there, made of vaidurya, wherein reside these great asura chiefs and snake chiefs along with Charanas.

(VI) ***INDRA NEELA MAYA SALA***

(HUMAN HEAVEN) (SAPHIRE)

Seven Yojanas from vaidurya sala and four yojanas in height lies the sala of Indraneela gems (Saphires). The streams and tanks therein are clear as crystal

and sweet to drink. Human beings from the earth become Siddhas and reach here as a result of their devotion to Sri Devi Lalita through their Japa of Her Great Mantra.

There are celestial damsels here who feed them well and give them drinks and other enjoyments to their hearts content-ever mindful of Sri Devi Lalita and Her great Mantra Raja. After enjoying here, they are again born into the world because of their insatiable desires. By worshipping "SRI CHAKRA" of Lalita, again they reach this Indraneela Maya Sala and enjoy pleasures to their full. After such repeated experiences, when calm devotion reigns in their hearts for Sri Devi Lalita, without further cravings and desires, they are united with Sri Devi Lalita, to become one with Her as a result of the acquisition of divine wisdom.

(VII) ***MUKTĀ RATNA MAYA SALA (SURA Svarga)***

(Eight Lokas of Dik Palas)

Seven yojanas away towards the interior from Indraneela Maya Sala and four yojana in height lies Mukta Ratna Maya Sāla. Here flow Tamraparni & Mahaparni rivers bounded by banks of pearls and flowing on a land of pearls and bearing pearls in abundance.

The inhabitants of SURALOKA who have made japa of the Mantraraja of Sri Devi Lalita arrive here after ending their enjoyments in Svargaloka.

Within this enclosure, walled by Muktā Ratna and Indra Neela Maya Prakara are the dwelling places of the great Dikpalas. Indra, the leader of the Gods rules the Eastern side; Agni the S.E., and Yama the South. In this Yamaloka, Yama who is well versed in Lalita Mantrajapa, is assisted by Chitragupta to punish the enemīes of Devi; those that have been cursed by their gurus, the unruly, the proud and haughty one, the obstinate, the lazy and indolent, the cruel and the unkind, the slayers of life, sinners and haters of women, adharmacharins; all these sinners are punished according to their deserts in various parts of this Yama Loka or Hell, (such as Kala, Ṣutra, Raurava, Angara, Tepana, Asipatravan etc.)

The rakshasa lord Niruti holding a khadga, rules the SW corner, surrounded by rakshasas in Rakshasaloka. The west is ruled by VARUNA riding on a mighty fish. This varuna is ever devoted to Sri Devi Lalita to such a great extent that he has made it his duty to punish the foes of Sri Lalita and to liberate and help Her great devotees in all manner of ways.

The N.W. corner is ruled by VAYU the wind god, and the Siddhas dwell there in bodies of vayu and also yoginis most powerful. The Pavamana(vayudeva)holds a dhwaja(flag) in his hand and rides on a mriga(deer) and is ever in peaceful contemplation of Sri Devi Lalita. The Saktis Ida, Pingala and Sushumna ever serve him. This Maruteswara obtained his great power to pulverize the worlds during pralaya through his japa of Sri Mantraraja of Lalita.

The North is ruled by the god of wealth KUBERA amidst his nine Treasures(Nava-Nidhis) and with his spouses Buddhi & Vriddhi. With him Mani-Bhadra, Pūrnabhadra, Manima, Manikhandhara and other Yakshas also dwell there worshipping Sri Devi.

The N.E.corner is ruled by Lord RUDRA ever in quiet contemplation and surrounded by Rudraganas capable of destroying the worlds in an instant.

Mahā Rudra is depicted here with angry red eyes, armed with bow and arrows, ready to destroy the worlds. His hair is matted and body is full of ornaments, and is surrounded by great beings like unto himself in form and arms. In this corner is a Chakra with 16 tiers or avaranas, occupied by Rudras and Rudranis, blissful ever in contemplation of Sri Devi Lalita and her Mantra raja. Innumerable are the parivāra devatas of Maha Rudra, occupying the under world, the earth and the firmanent. Some Rudras live on air and rain only and are full of tejas and red-eyed. Those that dwell in the firmament are with matted hair and armed with bows and arrows, blue and black in colour and strong-bodies. The Rudras ruling the earth are visikhas and kapardhinis. There are others guarding the pathways in all directions and biding in Theerthas - thousands of them. All these are intent on devotion to Sri Devi Lalita and ready to punish Her foes and protect Her devotees.They are ever in attendance on and obedient to the Maha Rudra who dwells at the centre of the Chakra of sixteen avaranas.

The 100 Rudras famed in the "Sata-Rudriya" ever remain removing obstacles.

Thus, Indra and other Dik-palas all abide in this pearl-decked enclosure, each in his own Loka.

(VII) MARAKATA (EMERALD) SALA

(VARAHI - LOKA)

Inside the pearl studded sala, seven yojanas away and four yojanas in height is the Emerald Prakara similar to the previous Salas in gopuras and doorways. Within this enclosure are four homes for Varahi Dhandini Devi similar to those of Syamala Devi. These dwellings are situated in the four corners: N.E.,S.E., S.W., and N.W..

The Kirichakra chariot is stationed in this enclosure consisting of seven tiers with all their avarana devis and saktis.

This emerald enclosure contains many golden palmyra gardens, and all good things are available therein. The Saktis dwelling therein are equal unto the avarana devis of Kirichakra, full of play, with rolling eyes, and bearing fearful weapons.

Hetuka and other Bhairaveswaras, as well as Jrumbhini and other Sakti damsels including the seven nigraha saktis roam about in the vicinity of the four houses of Vartali; Unmattha-Bhairavi, Swapnesi, Tiraskarini and Giripadadevi ever move near Vartali Devi serving her with great happiness. They punish evil doors and reward the good. Vartali has a place in Maha Padmatavi also.

(IX) VIDRUMAKARA - SALA (Coral)

BRAHMA - LOKA

Seven Yojanas away from Marakata Sala and four yojanas in height is

Vidrumakara Sala with the sheen of rising sun. Here dwells BRAHMA in his Branhma-Loka resting on his Lotus, and surrounded by many muniswaras, as well as Maricha and other creators of the worlds, ever in contemplation of Sri Devi Lalita.

The fourteen vidyas and a thousand upavidyas, also the sixty four kalas reside here in human forms magnificent, all obedient to Lalita Parameswari.

(X) MĀNIKYA - MANTAPA

NAVARATNA - SALA

VISHNU - LOKA

Seven yojanas from Vidruma sala and four yojanas higher, towards the interior, is the prakara of many gems (Navaratna Sala) with gates and gopuras as before. Herein lies the VISHNU LOKA and the enclosure itself goes by the name Mānikya Mantapasthana. The protector of the worlds, Lord Vishnu dwells here ever mindful of Devi's worship and Her Mantraraja. The fourfold, tenfold and twelve fold forms of Lord Vishnu dwell here in different forms though issuing forth from one Maha Vishnu. Himself, the ten avataras of Lord Vishnu which had issued forth from the ten finger nails of Sri Devi Lalita during her battle against Bhandāsura, also dwell here always, repeatedly appearing on Earth every Kalpa as and when necessary. Inside this Manikya Mantapa Lord Vishnu bearer of conch, discus and club(Mace) appears in 12 different forms.

DWADASA MURTIS OF LORD VISHNU

1. Lord Kesava: Of Jambunādaprabha resides in the eastern part of Manikya Mantapa.

2. Lord Nārāyana: With conch in hand-abides in the western part.

3. Lord Madhava: With conch in hand abides above it, and of Indivarasyama.

4. Lord Govinda: With conch stays in the sourth.

5. Lord Vishnu: With plough, stays in the northern part.

6. Lord Madhusudana: With musala is in S.E.shining like aravinda.

7. Lord Trivikrama: With khadga is in the S.W. shining like flame.

8. Lord Vāmana: With vajra dwells in the N.W. shining like Aditya.

9. Lord Sridhara: With pattasa is in the N.E.like unto Pundarika.

10. Lord Hrishikesa: With Mudgara is below, shining like lightning.

11. Lord Padmanabha: With saranga moves round Manikya Mandapa in clockwise direction, shining like a thousand suns, fully armed.

12. Lord Damodara: With pasa (noose)shining red, sarvajna moves around Manikya Mantapa in anti-clockwise direction, inside and outside sarva-saktimaya and aparajita all powerful.

(XI) THOUSAND-PILLARED MANTAPA

(ESWARA-LOKA)

Seven yojanas, further inwards, from the Manikya Mantapa at Vishnu Loka, lies the area of SIVA LOKA containing the thousand pillared Mantapa studded with all kinds of gems and gaily decorated in a most fascinating manner. On each side of it can be counted the thousand pillars inlaid with precious gems like lightning of all colours.

The 28 Saiva Agamas(Smritis) are personified there in their celestial form. Nandi, Bringi, Mahakala and the rest of the 26 Devatas reside therein. Thousands of Gajānanas shine there. The great Isana(Iswara) is the Lord of the Loka, ever mindful of the worship of Sri Devi Lalita and ever obedient to Her behests. He is ever in manana of Lalita Mantra Raja and ever immersed in Ananda. He gives mantra-siddhi to all, making them capable of dispelling both inner and outer darkness, giving them effulgent forms and filling them with shining medhā-sakti. He is sarvajna, sarvakarta and Mahadeva, ruling all Lokas, obedient to Sri Devi.

Thus dwell all Devas from Indra upto Ishwara in their respective Lokas in the various enclosures and Chakras around Sri Devi's abode.

HAYAGRIVA:"O Great Muni! I shall now describe to you some-thing which will wash away all sins, the hearing of which is sufficient to grant all prosperity;

(XII) MANO-NAMA MAHA SALA

Seven yojanas inwards from the sala of the thousand pillars, there lies the MĀNASA SALA bedecked with all the varieties of gems. The doorways and gopuras are similar to the previous enclosures. The enclosed area is known as the Manasa Lake of Amrta or (Amrts Vatika) Those who drink of this Nectar get diamond hard bodies of great strength together with all Siddhis and Yoga and great prajna, for these nectarine waters have indeed magical powers! The very fragrant breezes over this nectarine lake make one capable of becoming the Lord of the hand-maid of all Siddhis! He who even touches the waters of the Lake, getting wet or immersed in it, has all his sins and weaknesses washed away.

There is a dry bank of land around the edge of the lake. This lake is known as the unfordable Manasa Lake.On the surface of the lake swim two swans with enchanting curves, decked with many dazzling gems,with a golden sheen of variegated colours. These swans move from shore to shore creating unending ripples and waves on the surface of the Lake; they are immortal and free from all ailments by virtue of drinking of these magical waters of the Lake. these two swans ever utter the (soham) Japa of Sri Devi Lalita's Mantra Raja.

Nobody may cross the Manasa Lake from one bank to the other without the help of a boat and without the permission of either Dhandini Devi or Mantrini Devi. In charge of these boats is a chief by name Tara Maha Sakti who has many maids in her service for rowing the boats across. The beautiful gemdecked boats that ply from shore to shore on the Lake number in thousands, while the maids that ply

these boats number a crore. They are ever young and beautiful and are adepts in singing and dancing, playing on such musical instruments as the Vina, Venu, Mridanga etc. Some of these damsels are experts at plying the boats, others at playing the musical instruments, still others at singing, some excel in dancing; they surround their chief Tārāmba who joins them in play and song in great delight. She lets them ferry across on their boats, all those who had obtained permission (to cross the Lake) from either Dhandini Devi or Mantrini Devi. Tārāmba, three eyed, is ever singing praises of Lalita in great joy, while watching the gaily moving boats on the lake (like stars in the firmament), She protects and takes care of the many Sakti- damsels living in the gem studded boats whereon are houses which are also studded with nine varieties of gems. Some boats are of gold while others are of gems. Some are of the shape of alligators while others have the shape of animals; some are like the hands of lions while others are of stranger shapes. Thus surrounded by multi shaped boats Sri Taramba herself rides on a majestic and magnificent one. She is the form of Atma ever engaged in Lalita Mantra Japa. Seated on a Ratnāsana, she watches and directs the movement of the many boats while her own moves round on the lake sometimes in a clockwise direction and at others in an anti clockwise direction hither and thither. Thus she ever guards the Mānasa Lake and protects the many maids engaged in her service. On the other side of Manasa lake seven yojanas away towards the interior is, the Buddhi Sala.

(XIII) Within it is enclosed ĀNANDA VĀPIKA the lake of Ananda or ecstasy; and the sheen of Ananda Vapika is golden. Here also there are swans on the celestial lake, drinking from its waters of immortality. Here also are sakti maidens devoted to Sri Devi Lalita. Their chīef is VARUNI DEVI herself, who sits on a magnificent boat of gems surrounded by her hand maids watching the movement of the miriads of other boats moving on the lakes, as in the case of Taramba in the Manasa Lake. One look from this three eyed Devi will enchant all and make them tipsy as if drunk. Red and effulgent as the sun with blushing cheeks, suffused with blood , with parijata flowers in her hair, and looking into the eyes of her Lord who is ever ready to please her, she spends her time in Japa.

(XIV) AHANKĀRA SALA

After crossing the Ananda Vapika seven yojanas away from Buddhi sala towards the interior, we come to the Ahankara maha sala which is like the others in configuration with doors and gopuras. This Ahankara Maha Sala encloses *Vimarsa Vapika*, consisting of Amrita or nectar that flows from the Sushumna Nadi of Mahayogis, who practise pranayama and take their kundalini to the sahasrara. As in the case of the previous two lakes, here also dwell swans on the lake with gem-decked boats rowed by Sakti damsels. The goddess in command here is KURUKULLA DEVI dark of hue, wearing blue armour, surrounded by damsels similar to her in colour and dress and ornaments. Kurukulla Devi sits in her gem studded boat watching and commanding other boats, as in the previous two cases.

(XV) SURYA-BIMBA MAYA SALA

Seven yojanas away towards the interior from Ahankara sala, lies surya Bimba sala of four yojanas. The enclosure is red like kuruvinda and lighted up by the sun

and is known as Bālā Tapodgarasala. Bala Tripurasundari adorns the place. At the very sight of the place, Suras, Siddhas, Naras and even Asuras will obtain the tejas of the Sun. It was here that the Sun and the stars had performed Tapas and obtained their present glowing bodies to light the worlds and support them. Martanda Bhairava (The sun) dwells here with the twelve adityas, surrounded by crores of Sakti damsels glowing with maha-tejas. He plays and wanders under the shade of Kankāli trees in the company of:

Mahaprakasa Sakti,

Chakshushmati Devi and

Chaya Devi

They are ever devoted to Sri Devi Lalita and mindful of Her Mantra-Japa. They help to remove both outer and inner darkness from Lalita's devotees.

(XVI) CHANDRA BIMBA MAYA SALA

Seven yojanas away towards the interior, from Surya Bimba Maya Sala, is Chandra Bimba Maya Sala, also four yojanas in extent and equal to the previous one in the matter of doors and gopuras; the land enclosed is named "CHANDRIKODGARA, for it was here that the moon had performed great tapas to obtain his present glory. Here dwells "SOMANĀDHA" lighting the three worlds with his cool beams. He is surrounded by 27 constellations of stars in celestial maiden forms. He is ever full in his great and true form, never undergoing the apparent waning and waxing phases, and without any spot. He grants the wishes of the devotees of Sri Lalita and also pleases the constellations which reside there in devotion to Sri Devi.

(XVII) SRINGĀRA SALA

Proceeding seven yojanas from Chandrikodgara Sala, towards the interior, we come to the Sringara Sala of four yojanas. The enttire area is most beautiful and enchanting, captivating the hearts of on-lookers and filling them with great ecstasy. The place is inhabited by exquisite damsels decked in celestial ornaments, and moving gracefully in gem-studded boats numbering thousands. Their master and Lord is the bearer of flowery arrows Madana who enchants and rules the hearts of the three worlds, unopposed. He is ever intent on devotion to Sri Devi Lalita who had regenerated him after the destruction of Bhandasura.

Due to the moha caused by Manmadha, the Suras, Siddhas, Naras and Asuras cannot gain entrace to the Maha Padmatavi (Forest of great Lotuses); only those with a pure chitta, like unto Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara may enter this magnificent and enchanting garden of great Lotuses. Of course, the pure and peaceful ones who are immersed in devotion to Sri Devi Lalita Rajarajeswari always gain entrance here. Those who are prey to moha and delusion, whose chitta is unsteady, whose minds are not under control, who are stupid, can never think of getting a view of this great place of beauty and enchantment ever under the protection of Madhana the great deluder of the three worlds.

(XVIII) GARDEN OF GREAT LOTUSES : CHINTAMANI MANSION

Six yojanas from this Sringara Sala towards the interior is the spot which is the centre of Sri Nagara and houses the great mansion of CHINTAMANI gems surrounded by the garden of great lotuses. Within the mansion magnificent is the wonderful Sri Chakra Raja, the abode of Sri Devi Lalita Rajarajeswari and Lord Kameswara or Rajarajeswara.

The entire enclosure is resplendent with gems which yield all prosperity. There are gopuras all along the four sides right up to the boundary of Sringara Sala. There are in all twenty prakaras and at the rate of four gopuras lying on the four sides of each prakara, there are altogether a hundred gopuras. The prakaras are a yojana apart each to each. I shall now relate to you the Mahatmya of this enclosure full of great lotus blooms. Listen, O Muni! Within this enclosure of gems are great lotus blooms attached to soft but thorny tendrils for a yojana in length. The leaves are 80 inches in diameter. Their fine hair like fibres are each 40 inches long. The central vortex of the lotus bloom, surrounded by many such leaves is a hundred spans in length. They are very tender and soft and ever in full bloom scattering fresh and enchanting fragrance in all directions. There are crores and crores of these great lotus blooms filling this large lake which is a veritable forest of Padmas. On the eastern side of this Maha Padmatavi,is a round cup-like dish, a vessel for worship the arghya patra, half a yojana in width shining like the Sun himself with his ten kalas, this is the great vessel for worship of Sri Devi Lalita. Around this vessel are mighty guardian saktis like Dhumrārchi and others, shining in their ten kalas like Luxmi Devi herself and bedecked with all varieties of ornaments with the beauty of Manmadha: They are:

1. Dhumrarchi	2. Rushma	3. Jwāalini
4. Jwalini	5. Visphulingika	6. Suari
7. Surupa	8. Kapila	9. Havyavaha
10. Kavyavaha.		

These ten kalas of fire are in the patra (vessel for worship). The sun exists there in the shape of this great big saucer, dispelling the darkness of the three worlds. This sun-like vessel is half a yojana in height and a yojana in area, and is jyotirupa. In it are the twelve kalas of the sun personified as his little daughters.

1. Tapini	2. Taapini	3. Dhumra	4. Marichi
5. Jwalini	6. Ruchi	7. Sushumna	8. Bhogasta
9. Viswa	10. Bodhini	11. Dharini	12. Kahema

In that wonder vessel is nectar paramāmrita capable of yielding great and ecstatic joy(Mahananda) and which is a panacea, basis for all types of medicines scattering sweet fragrance like the nectar of the blue lotus, cool and crystal clear and well suited for worship of Sri Devi Lalita, granting all Siddhis. This nectar goes by the

name of Nisakara-kalamaya-nectar or that which consists of the kalas of the make of the night(moon); little gem studded boats float in it carrying these sasi kalas personified as young and beautiful damsels:

1.AMRITA	2.MAANADA	3.PUSHPA	4.PUSHTI
5.TUSHTI	6.RATI	7.DHRITI	8.SASINI
9.CHANDRIKA	10.KĀNTI	11.JYOTSNA	12.SRI
13.PRĪTI	14.ANGADA	15.PŪRNA	16.PURNĀMRITA

These young damsels are youthful and beautiful, shining resplendent and full c happy smiles. Playing there, are also ten Brahma-Kalas capable of creating th worlds:

1. Srishti	2. Buddhi	3. Smriti	4. Medha
5. Kāanti	6. Luxmi	7. Dhyuti	8. Sthira
9. Sthithi	10. Siddhi		

Moon among Munis! it is impossible to describe their beauty and charm. Ther too, are ten Hari-Kalas:

1. Jara	2. Pālini	3. Santi	4. Iswari
5. Rati	6. Kāmika	7. Varada	8. Hladini
9. Priti	10. Dirgha		

Also Ten Raudra Kalas:

1. Tikshna	2. Raudri	3. Bhaya	4. Nidra
5. Tandri	6. Kshuth	7. Krodhini	8. Kriya
9. Utkāri	10. Mrityu		

The four Iswara Kalas playing there are:

1. Pita	2. Sweta	3. Varuna	4. Sitā

And 16 Sadasiva Kalas

1. Nivrithi	2. Pratishta	3. Vidya	4. Sānti
5. Indira	6. Dipika	7. Rechika	8. Moshika
9. Para	10. Sūkshma	11. Sukshmasri	12. Jnana
13. Amrita	14. Āpyayini	15. Vyapini	16. Vyamarupika

These move about and play also, riding in very small boats, all the many vidyas personified as little pretty damsels of Sakti, numbeing in thousands.

All these many Sakti damsels and Kala damsels test the purity and eligibility of this arghya for Sri Devi and they are all thus drunk with this necter. Even the Saktis and yoginis dwelling in the various avaranas of the SRI CHAKRA and in this Maha Padmatavi also partake of this nectar in thousands of gem studded vessels, large and small, quaffing the nectar again and again. Every time it has a new taste and a new smell; so much so, they never tire of drinking it to their fill. Even the Sakti hand-maids abiding in the great Mansion of Chintamani gems quaff it with great delight; but *the quantity in the immense cup never decreases.*

I have described to you all about tha Arghya-Patra established on the eastern section of the Garden of great Lotus blooms. I shall now describe to you the great Mansion of Chintamani Gems.

DESCRIPTION OF COURT YARD OF CHINTAMANI MANSION

SRI HAYAGRIVA;

On the S.E. side of Chintamani Mansion is a Homa Kunda, a yojana in area and a yojana in depth. Therein burns Chidagni maintained by the flow of Sudha in obedience to Lalita Parameswari; it burns with a great flame, fed by sudha alone. The tongues of flame shine as bright as if fed by the wood of Ashoka tree. The Hotri is Mahadevi and Hota is Kameswara. Thus they both protect the worlds by unceasing homa. Uncontrolled by another, Sri Devi Lalita Rajarajeswari reigns supreme, while Kamasankara Rajarajeswara acts on Devi's suggestions or requests.

On the S.W. side of Chintamani Mansion,within the garden of Great Padmas, is stationed the Great Sri Chakra Raja chariot of Sri Devi Lalita, nine tiered and bedecked with all varieties of brilliant gems; it represents the four vedas and is the grantor of the four purusharthas. The line of steps represent the Tatvas; it is decorated with exquisite fans and a pearl umbrella. The holy seat of Sri Devi is at the top of this great chariot.

On the N.W.side of Chintamani Mansion, within the garden of Great Lotuses there is stationed the *GeyaChakra* chariot of Sri Mantrini Devi Syamalamba.

On the N.E. Side of Chintamani Mansion, within the *garden of Great Lotuses,* stands the *KIRI CHAKRA* chariot of Dhandini Devi Varahi.

To the immediate west of the ever-burning Kunda, there dwells Gayatri; west of her is Abhayamkara, to the west again is Ghrinissurya; further lies *the Omkara Mandira, Devi Turiya Gayatri* and *Chakshushmati;* to the west again lives *Gandharva Raja Viswavasu* and the *six Rudras (of the paths);* fruther west dwells *Tarambika; Bhaghawathi.*

On the S.W. of Chintamani Mansion also resides *Bhagawan Hari* (The vachya Shakti) Lord of the Maha Mantra of triple names *("ACHUTANANTA GOVINDA")* North of him is the residence of *Maha Ganapati.* Further north is the residence of Lord

Shiva the vachya Sakti of the mantra of five letters- The *Panchākshari.* North of it again is the home of *Mrityunjayeswara* the Lord of the *Mantra of Three Letters;* north still resides the *Saraswati* of the name of *Dharana;* north again is the resting place of *Matrika Sakti,* the personification of the *alphabet* from *"A" to "Ksha"!* north of it lives *Sampadesi-Kālasangkarshini.* Also lives there *Sri Maha Sambhunadha* who was responsible for the birth of Sri Devi Lalita. Therein also dwells *Sri Parāmba* with Sri Maha Sambhunadha in her great effulgence and pure form. North of them, in order, are the Mandiras of *Bālā Devi, Sri Annapurna* as well as *Hayarudha;* still further north is the Mandira of *Sri Pāduka.*

Near the western gateway of Chintamani Mandira live, one north of the other the apara devatas *Laghusyama, Vāgwādhini* and others Sri *Nakulambika, Syama,* upto the N.W. side of the Chintamani Mansion.

On the N.W. side of Chintamani Mansion within the garden of great padmas, there are the residences of Unmatha, Bhairavi, Swapna-Varahika, Tiraskaranikamba, Panchami. As before, here are the residences of *Sri Purti Mahadevi and Sri Maha Paduka,* All these devatas and Devis reside here in their effulgence, ever mindful of the worship of Sri Devi Lalita

At the Eastern Gateway to Chintamani Mansion, on either side dwell *Sri Syamalamba* on the right side and *Sri Vartali* on the left, their residences studded with gems. *Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara* dwell east of the Arghyapatra. Their homes are brilliant with the rays of scintillating gems scattering light in all directions. All the devas are full of devotion to Sri Devi Lalita and ever live meditating on the *Japa of Mantraraja.*

HAYAGRIVA: Listen O Muni! I shall now describe the Mansion of Chintamani gems which lies at the centre of the garden of great Lotuses. The wall around the mansion is also studded with chintamani gems. The stupa(gopura)on this wall is twenty yojanas more in height and is topped by three crowns (kalasas) representing Ichcha, Kriya and Jnana, ever effulgent with chintamani gems. There are four gateways, each half a krosa in width. Through each such opening stream forth the red radiance of Sri Devi Lalitamba's body bright as the rising of a thousand suns, and cool as the effect of a thousand full moons. Each of the four gates represents a VEDA (sampradaya tradition) Amnaya Mantras proceed from each of these four gates and from above originating from the five faces of Lord Shiva.

FIRST AVARANA OF SRI CHAKRA :

In the very centre of Chintamani Mansion exists the most beautiful Bindu Chakra the throbbing point from which all life and creation emanate. The brightness here is that of a crore of suns dazzling with clusters of Chintamani gems; and is occupied by Meru Sri Chakra. The space of three krosas from the Central Bindu ends with the atma-splendour of Anima and the other Siddhis. In the outer section above the garden of Great Lotuses, there reside ANIMA and other Siddhis. Starting from the East and proceeding in a clock wise direction are:

1. Anima   2. Mahima   3. Garima   4. Laghima

5. Isitva 6. Vasitva 7. Prākāmya 8. Bhukti

9. Iccha 10. Prapti / sarvakama

These 10 auspicious Siddhis exist on the outside. In the inner area are:

1. Rasa Siddhi 2. Moksha Siddhi 3. Bala Siddhi

4. Khadga Siddhi 5. Pāduka Siddhi 6. Anjana Siddhi

7. Vaak Siddhi 8. Loha Siddhi 9. Deha Siddhi

In addition, there are other minor Siddhis, crores of them, exquisitely beautiful of form with smiling faces adorned with chintamani gems and ever sixteen years of age with a most calm and gentle attitude ever playful and full of joy.

2. Going inwards, higher, in an area occupying the four sides, are eight Matrika Devis most powerful and magnificent:

1. Brahmi 2. Maheswari 3. Kaumari 4. Vaishnavi

5. Varahi 6. Mahendri 7. Chamundi 8. Maha Luxmi

Each of them has a variety of weapons, surrounded by different Shakti maidens.

3. Going inwards, rising again, is the abode of ten Mudra Devis; starting from the east again, and proceeding in clockwise direction, they are:

1. Sarva Samkshobini Mudra Devi
2. Sarva Vidravini Mudra Devi
3. Sarva Akarshini Mudra Devi
4. Sarva Avesa Karini(Vasya) Mudra Devi
5. Sarva Unmadini Mudra Devi
6. Sarva Mahankusa Mudra Devi
7. Sarva Khechari Mudra Devi
8. Sarva Bija Mudra Devi
9. Maha Yoni Mudra Devi
10. Trikhandika Mudra Devi

These Mudra Devis are exquisitely beautiful, filled with ever new youth, attraction, and grace and are ever serving SRI DEVI LALITA - RAJA RAJESWARI.

The above mentioned three inner areas combined form to the "TRAILOKYA MOHANA CHAKRA" of three squares deluding the three worlds; and all the Saktis or energies abiding therein are called PRAKATA YOGINIS. The *Nayika or Commander of this TRAILOKYA MOHANA CHAKRA is "TRIPURA DEVI" and the Ruler is the Mudra Devi Sarva Samkshobini, the agitator of all.*

Second Avarana:

Above the abode of the ten Mudra Devis, rising inwards is the abode of the Nitya Kalas; the Chief of them being Kāmā karshinika, with the 16 Indu Kalas filling all the directions with their coolness and life giving nectar. Their names are:

1. Kamakarshinika Nitya Kala
2. Buddhyakarshinika Nitya Kala
3. Ahankarakarshinika Nitya Kala
4. Sabdhakarshinika Nitya Kala
5. Sparsakarshinika Nitya Kala
6. Rupakarshinika Nitya Kala
7. Rasakarshinika Nitya Kala
8. Gandhakarshinika Nitya Kala
9. Chittakarshinika Nitya Kala
10. Dhairyakarshinika Nitya Kala
11. Smrtyakarshinika Nitya Kala
12. Namakarshinika Nitya Kala
13. Bijakarshinika Nitya Kala
14. Atmakarshinika Nitya Kala
15. Amritakarshinika Nitya Kala
16. Sarirakarshinika Nitya Kala

These devis are Gupta Yoginis.

The Chakrini is Tripuresi.

The Ruling Devi is Mudra Dravinika

The Chakra is called: SARVASAPARIPURAKA.

Third Avarana:

Proceeding inwards, higher, is the dwelling place, of eight young Saktis, called:

"SARVA SAMKSHOBANA CHAKRA"

The eight Saktis dwelling herein are full of energy, with reddened eyes and elated with joy in serving PARAMESWARI.

They are.:

1. Ananga Kusuma
2. Ananga Mekhala
3. Ananga Madana
4. Ananga Madanatura
5. Ananga Rekha
6. Ananga Vegini
7. Ananga Ankusa
8. Ananga Malini

These Devis are surrounded by crores of Saktis and are called GUPTATARA YOGINIS. The Chakrini is Tripura Sundari. The ruler of the Chakra is SARVAKARSHINIKA MUDRA.

<u>Fourth Avarana:</u>

Rising higher into the interior, is the Chakra. *"SARVA SAUBHAGYA DAYAKA"*

Herein dwell 14 Shakti Devis:

1. Sarva Samkshobini Sakti
2. Sarva Vidravini Sakti
3. Sarva Akarshinika Sakti
4. Sarva Ahladinika Sakti
5. Sarva Sammohini Sakti
6. Sarva Sthmbhana Sakti
7. Sarva Jrimbhana Sakti
8. Sarva Vasamkari Ṣakti
9. Sarva Ranjana Sakti
10. Sarva Unmadhana Sakti
11. Sarva Arthasadhani Sakti
12. Sarva Sampathipūrani Sakti
13. Sarva Mantramayi Sakti
14. Sarva Dwandwa kshayankari Sakti

These Saktis are termed *SAMPRADAYAKA YOGINIS.*

The Chakrini is TRIPURA VĀSINI. The Ruler is SARVA VASYA MUDRA.

This Chakra, as in the case of all the others, is also protected by crores of Kinkara Saktis.

Fifth Avarana:

Above again there are ten *Kulothirna yoginis:*

1. Sarva Siddhiprada Devi
2. Sarva Sampat prada Devi
3. Sarva Priyangkari Devi
4. Sarva Mangalakarini Devi
5. Sarva Kamaprada Devi
6. Sarva Duhkha Vimochani Devi
7. Sarva Mrutyu Prasamani Devi
8. Sarva Vignanivarini Devi
9. Sarva Angasundari Devi
10. Sarva Soubhagyadayini Devi

THE CHAKRINI IS TRIPURA SRI

THE RULER IS SARVONMĀDANA MUDRĀ DEVI

THE CHAKRA IS SARVĀRTHA SADHAKAM

Sixth Avarana:

Above this is the SARVA RAKSHAKARA CHAKRA on which dwell ten Nigarbha Yoginis:

1. Sarvajna Devi
2. Sarva Sakti Devi
3. Sarvaisvarya Pradayini Devi
4. Sarva Jnanamayi Devi
5. Sarva Vyadhi Vinasini Devi
6. Sarva Adhara Swarupa Devi
7. Sarva Papāhara Devi
8. Sarva Anandamayi Devi
9. Sarva Rakshaswarupini Devi
10. Sarva Ipsita Phala Prada Devi

These ten are Nigarbha Yoginis.

The Chakrini is Tripura Malini

The Ruler is Sarva Mahangkusa Mudra.

FURTHER INSIDE OF CHINTAMANI GRIHARAJA AND CLOSER TO DEVA DEVI

SRI HAYAGRIVA: I have narrated to you about the avarana Devis upto Servajna Devi and Nigarbha Yoginis. I shall now name the other Yoginis living further inside the Chintamani Mansion in the remaining enclosures, around the Bindu Platform. Listen, O Muni!

Seveth Avarana:

Higher up is an enclosure, occupied by Vasini and other Devis:

SARVA ROGAHARA CHAKRA

Starting from the east and proceeding in the clockwise order:

1. Vasiniswari Vaak Devi

2. Kameswari(Vaangmayi) - Ka Varga

3. Modiniswari - Cha Varga (Vagisvari)

4. Vimaleswari - Ta Varga (Sarasvati)

5. Aruniswari - Tha Varga (Vagadisi)

6. Jayiniswari - Pa Varga (Vagrvadini)

7. Sarveswari - Ya Varga (Vāngmayi)

8. Kauliniswari - Sa Varga (Sarada)

These eight Vaak Devis are effulgent with jewels and are of the colour of red japa flower and ever filled with the arts of prose and poetic composition well versed in kavya, dance, drama, agamas, vedas, vedanta and other arts and sciences. They have composed the Lalita Sahasranama. These eight Devis make Sri Devi Lalitamba ever happy by their sweet recitations, talk, dance and song,and romantic narrations, causing joy. All these Devis are called Rahasya Yoginis. Their Chakrini is TRIPURA SIDDHAMBA and the ruler (Protector) of the Chakra is Khechari Mudramba.

Eighth Avarana:

Higher, towards the centre is the Astra Chakra or (Sarva Siddhi Prada Chakra). Therein are the Adhi devatas of Astra Chakra.

5 arrows of Kameswari

5 arrows of Kameswara

2 Angkusas, one of Kameswari and one of Kameswara

2 Bows, one of Kameswari and the otner of Kameswara, maae of sugarcane.

2 pasas (nooses) belonging to Sri Devi and Kama Sankara.

There are thus four types of weapons belonging to Kameswari Devi and four similar types of weapons belonging to Lord Kameswara. They are all effulgent with great power and splendour. Therein also are the crores of weapons used by the parivara devatas of Devi as well as the many Sakti hosts of damsels. These are the many vajrams, bhusundi, musalam, krpanam, mudgaram, pattasam, bhindivalakam and other types of weapons, each numbering in crores. All these smaller Saktis are there serving the great and majestic Ayudha Maha Sakti of Sri Devi and Kama Sankara.

Ninth Avarana:

Higher up, known as the place of SAMAYESI, therein are three Devis

Kamesi (Maha Kameswari)

Vajresi (Maha Vajreswari)

Bhagesi (Maha Bhagamalini)

These Devis are in turn waited upon by thousands of Saktis.Herein the Yogini is Parapara Rahasya Yogini; Yoni Mudramba is the ruler.

Above and behind this Bindusthana is:

NADHANTARA (GURUS)

Herein are the Nathas, adepts in the yoga sastra of Mahadevi. All of them are Mantra-Gurus, well-versed in all Vidyas. There are four Lords of the four yugas respectively, all created by Lord Kameswara Himself. They are:

Mitresanandanatha

Uddisanandanatha

Shastisanandanatha

Charyanandanatha

These four gurus, in turn created many more sub-gurus for the protection of the worlds, and divided them into 3 classes:

Divyaughas

Siddhoughas

Maanavoughas

who acquired Salokya, Sarupya and Sayujya siddhis and waited on the four Gurus mentioned above.

Above and behind Bindu sthāna is:

NITYANTARAM

Where dwell the fifteen Nitya Devis. They are:

1. Kameswari Nitya
2. Bhagamalini Nitya
3. Nityaklinna Nitya
4. Bherunda Nitya
5. Vahnivasini Nitya
6. Mahavidyeswari Nitya
7. Siva Dhuti Nitya
8. Twarita Nitya
9. Kulasundari Nitya
10. Nitya Nitya
11. Nilapataka Nitya
12. Vijaya Nitya
13. Sarva Mangala Nitya
14. Jwalamalinika Nitya
15. Chitra Nitya

All these Nityas resemble Sri Devi Lalita (except that Sri Devi is seated on Kameswara's lap). They are all very powerful and full of great energy. They are of the essence of Time and worshipped by the Trimurtis themselves. They are the angarakshakas (body guards) of SRI DEVI. The Svaras are their homes and Bindu Chakra is the 16th kshetra of Sri Devi Parambıka.

Above this place again is the *ANGADEVYANTARA*

Where six beautıful Devis reside wonderfully decked with jewels and fully armed to protect different parts or angas of Sri Devi.

They are:

1. Hridaya Devi
2. Siro Devi
3. Sikha Devi
4. Varma Devi(Kavacha Devi)
5. Netra Devi
6. Śastra Devi(Astra Devi)

These six Devis are the six hand-maids or guardians of SRI DEVI so to speak,and they are ever nearest to Her. They dwell surrounding the Bindu Pitha which is shining as million suns,and cool as a million moons.

BINDU PITHA itself is also known as

Sri Pitha

Maha Pitha

Vidyā Pitha

Ananda Pitha

Here, Sri Devi Lalita rests on a cot represented by the five Lords in charge of creation. The cot has four legs, each ten cubits long and three cubits thick. The four legs represent the energies of the Trimurtis and Iswara.

One leg of the cot, of the colour of red Japā-flower and representing Brahma's Energy faces S.E.

The second leg, of the colour of blue lotus represents Vishnu's Energy and faces S.W.

The third leg, clear as crystal, represents Rudra's Energy and faces N.W.

The fourth leg of the colour of Karnikara represents Iswara's Energy and faces N.E.

The top and bottom of the four legs are the shape of pillars while their middle parts have the shapes of the above four different Lords of the worlds, decked with ornaments and suitably armed and with eyes half closed in Dhyana of Sri Devi.

On top of the four legs of the cot is the plain surface representing Sadasiva's Energy. This surface is of the colour of pomegranate and the bright aura extends over an unlimited extent all around.

Starting from Angadevyantara and proceeding up to the surface of the cot of Sri Devi Lalita, the entire place teems with clusters of chintamani gems arranged as thirtysix steps leading to the cot of the divine couple Kamesvara and Kamesvari as representing the

Thirty Six Tattvas

In ascending order, these steps are:

1. Earth 2. Water 3. Fire 4. Air 5. Ether 6. Gandha 7. Rasa 8. Rupa 9. Sparsa 10.Sabdha 11.Upastha 12 Payu 13. Pada 14. Pani 15. Vaak 16. Ghrana 17. Jihwa 18. Chekshu 19. Twak 20. Srotra 21. Manas 22. Buddhi 23. Ahankara 24. Prakriti 25. Purusha 26. Niyatih 27. Kalaa 28. Raaga 29. Kaala 30. Vidya 31. Maya 32. Iswara 33. Shuddha Vidya 34. Sada Siva 35. Shakti(Paraa) 36. Shiva(Paraa)

These 36 Tatvas are all arranged as steps, east of the cot.The surface of the cot dazzles with the brightness of a crore of suns; the middle portion sparkles and glitters like lightning;and at the head of the cot is a spitoon studded with pearls and gems.

On the top of the cot is a mattress of the shape of a swan, (Hansa-Talpa). At the head and foot of this mattress are two, shining pillows four in all. On top of it all is a bed-sheet of the colour of orange-red, clean and sending out rays of padmaraga gems(rubies).

On such a cot is seated, facing the East, full of mercy scattering SRNGARA youthfulness and ever appearing as sixteen years of age with face like the rising sun, four-armed, three-eyed, ornamented with hāra-Keyura Mukuta, Kataka etc., smiling with sweet jyoti: BHAGAWAN SRI ADI DEVA KAMESWARA.

On his left lap, is seated Lalita Devi shining like the early sun, looking ever as of sixteen years of age, brimming with new youthfulness, Her feet and toe nails shining with the sheen of padmaraga gems, the soles and edges of the feet smeared with red lac and appearing like a stream of redness.

WITH ANKLETS GEM-FILLED, AND TINKLING WITH BELLS

WITH CALVES PUTTING TO SHAME THE PRIDE OF ANANGA'S SHEATH OF ARROWS

WITH THIGHS RESEMBLING PLANTAIN TRUNKS

BEDECKED IN RED CLOTHES SOFT TO THE TENDER SKIN

ADORNED WITH A GEM-STUDDED WAIST BAND

WITH THREE FOLDS AROUND THE NAVEL AND WAIST

WITH PEARL-NECKLACES OVER THE HIGH PROTRUDING BREASTS

WITH THIN WAIST BELOW THE HEAVING BREASTS

WITH FOUR SHOULDERS DELICATE WITH ARM-BANDS BANGLES. AND RINGS ADORNING THE WRISTS AND FINGERS,

WITH NECK, LIKE A CONCH BEAUTIFUL

WITH RED CHIN, CHEEKS AND LIPS ON MIRROR LIKE FACE

WITH A SET OF PURE WHITE TEETH, REPRESENTING THE 32 VIDYAS

WITH A SMILE EXPOSING THE MOON-LIKE TEETH.

SHINING WITH A LARGE PEARLY NOSE-ORNAMENT

WITH EYES SHINING AND STRETCHING LENGTHWISE BOTH WAYS

WITH WIDE FOREHEAD OF THE SHAPE OF HALF-MOON

WITH EARS ADORNED BY GEM-STUDDED EAR ORNAMENTS

EVER PLEASED WITH CHEWING BETEL WITH FRAGRANCE OF CAMPHOR
WITH A SWEET FACE LIKE UNTO THE LORD OF THE NIGHT FULL-MOON

WITH A CROWN STUDDED WITH LAYERS OF KURUVINDA GEMS

WITH THE THIRD EYE ON THE FORE-HEAD LOOKING LIKE FIRE

WITH HAIR BLACK AS THICK DARKNESS

WITH RED VERMILION LINING THE PARTING OF HER HAIR

WITH EYES SHINING WITH BENIGN LOVE

BEDECKED IN ALL BEAUTY AND ORNAMENTS GALORE

MOTHER OF ALL WORLDS AND EVER BLISSFUL;

RULER OF BRAHMA, VISHNU. RUDRA, ISWARA AND SADASIVA.

THUS SHINES BHAGAVATI LALITA THE DISPELLER OF SINS AND WOES.

WHOEVER WORSHIPS OTHER DEVATAS ALSO GET THE DESIRED FRUITS OF WORHSIP;BUT ALL SUCH FRUITS ALSO FLOW FROM DEVI WHOM ALL THE WORSHIPS REACH.

THUS HAS BEEN DESCRIBED THE BEAUTY OF DEVI LALITA'S AUSPICIOUS BODY.

NOT ONE PART OF THOUSANDS OF CRORES OF HER BEAUTY IS THE ABOVE DESCRIPTION.

EVEN WORDS FAIL TO GIVE AN IDEA OF THE REAL FORM.

HAYAGRIVA: O KUMBHA SAMBHAVA!

HOW CAN WORDS DESCRIBE WHAT THE MIND CANNOT GRASP?

"*WHAT THE MIND CANNOT REACH, HOW CAN THE SPEECH ACCOMPLISH?* This is a proverb prononuced by many of yore; it is the nature of things. Listen!I do not speak from partiality, nor friendship, nor delusion, O Thou Treasure-house of austerity! With Kalpa- Taru,for a pen to write with, the seven oceans as a mighty vessel of ink, the entire Earth as paper to write on, and given a time equiavalent to many celestial years, and if all the inhabitants of all the Lokas were given a crore of hands each, and made equal unto Brihaspati in wisdom and capacity, even then, they will not be able to complete the description of one thousandth part of the greatness of a single Toe on Sri Devi Lalita's Foot. That being the case, all speech is indeed powerless in praising Her Qualities.

Surrounding the Bindu on all four sides, there is a curtain resplendant, shining like peacock feathers;and representing the great veil of Illusion.

Above Sri Devi (& Kameswara) is a dome of such exquisite beauty and celestial workmanship, of the lustre of carmelion, the like of which cannot be seen anywhere else in the three wörlds. When the mind itself is unable to grasp its auspicious magnificence, how can words be strung together to describe the same!

Thus, for the purpose of slaying the Mahadaıtya Bhandasura, was born Sri Devi Lalitamba from the Chidagni flames of Maha Shambhu. Having completely destroyed Bhandasura with all his relatives and subjects and armies, without any residue whatever, Sri Devi resides in this Sri Nagara consisting of sixteen kshetras constructed by celestial architects for the welfare of the three worlds.

Innumerable Sri Nagaras of similer glory,invisible to mortal eyes, Sri Devi Lalita brings into existence in all places, wherever and whenever Sri Devi's devotees call upon her Name for satisfying their desires day by day for creating unlimited opportunities to them and for protecting them from all harm.

He who hears, reads, writes, recites, imagines or meditates on the glory of Sri Nagara beginning with the outer enclosure filled with great gardens of all varieties of trees and plants of all seasons, shall obtain his heart's desires even unto liberation from all bonds.

WHOSOEVER constructs a model of Sri Nagara, with all its many prakaras and enclosures and dedicates it to Sri Devi Lalita, shall indeed become a Jivanmukta. So saying Sri Hayagriva remained silent for a while with eyes half-closed in ecstasy.

S U B H A M A S T U

O M T A T S A T O M

PHALA SRUTI

HAYAGRIVA:

O Kumbha Sambhava! Whoso hears this sacred story of SRI DEVI LALITAMBA, all Siddhis reside in his hands and will never depart from him.

WHOSO reads or even listens to it will attain Deva Loka, being freed from all sins.

HE/SHE who desires a spouse will obtain a most desirable one; One who is after victory, will attain victory; who desires moksha, will attain moksha, who wants dharma, will get dharma; who is after artha, will get artha; who wants children will obtain children; who is after wisdom or the sciences will obtain them without fail; who desires Yoga will receive Yoga; A king who desires a kingdom, will win a kingdom; He who desires to gain a village, will get a village; the pregnant woman will obtain a son; a virgin will obtain a good husband; and a bachelor a devout wife.

Whatever one may desire, by reading of this story, or by listening to it,one will immediately obtain one's desires; and the Devas will certainly be kind and generous to such an one.

A Ruler who listens to the history of Sri Devi's successful war against Bhandasura, will become fearless of his foes and obtain victory, of a certain. Whoso reads this sacred story of Sri Devi Lalita, on purpose and with devotion , will be blessed with sons grandsons and great grand children; and will be cured of all diseases, whether due to vaata, pitta or sleshma. He/She will not become prey to accidental or any other form of sudden death; no serpent will ever bite him, nor insects sting. One will not succumb to poison; for poison will have no power over such ; one will not be dull or stupid, mute or dumb; one will not have fear of any being; nor need one have fear of earthquakes, floods, famines etc.

Black magic will not touch such an one.

One who reads it daily will obtain full satisfaction of all one's cherished desires.

Whatever punya is acquired by pilgrimages to holy places and theerthas, by reading or listening to this, one obtains such punya crorefold more; also the punya obtained by performing ten times Rajasuya and hundred times Agnishtoma will be gained by reading this.

No Bhuta or animal or man or anything can slay such an one: and one will live full span of life free from all diseases.

When in danger from a King, Ruler or Government Action, when ill or beset by robbers etc., the thought of this story or remembrance of any part of it, or the reading of it with purpose, will free one from all such troubles, trials and tribulations.

Wherever this book is copied or rewritten, O Kumbhasambhava! that place will be free from diseases, famine and poverty.

This story of Sri Devi Lalita dealing with her lilas and Mahatmya is equivalent to a drink of Nectar as well as a darshan of the Deity.

This story must be read during all festivals relating to Devi. All other devatas and Goddesses in the three worlds have Sri Devi Lalita for their very self(Atma), and therefore, they will not be pleased if this story is not read during their festival.

In particular, during the Durga festival, one should listen to this story when read by another; or one should read it oneself, before the sacred presence of Devi Durga with a steady mind. Reading thus for one, two or three days, with a firm intent and purpose, one acquires siddhi in all things. Thus the inhabitants of the three worlds can please even Devi Durga and obtain Her darshan by reading the story of Sri Devi Lalita during Saran-Navaratri.

Whether one is clean or not, whatever state one may be in, the reading of this upakhyanam purifies and cleanses one. This reading of the upakhyanam relating to the Lilas of Sri Devi Lalita is equivalent in fruit, to the reading, a crore of times of Saptasati the story of the Lilas of Chandika.

Whosoever readeth this story with a pure mind and with great devotion, will be freed from all sorrow, and,in the end,attain to Sri Devi Lalita who is the shining lamp of all wisdom and grantor of full satisfaction including Moksha.

OM TAT SAT OM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Krishnandanatha alias Mallem Sree Venugopal Rao was born in 1910 in Venkatagiri in Nellore District of Andhra Pradesh. He however had his education in Rangoon in the Erstwhile Burma where his father was practicing as a Barister-at-Law in the High Court of Rangoon. He was interested in spiritual matters from his boyhood and wrote a book "QUEST OF LIFE" at the age of 23 which was well received in Burma and India.

After returning to India just before the second world war, he became deeply interested in Hindu philosophy and studied all the Upanishads and Puranas. He became an Upasaka of Devi Sri Lalitha and attained the highest levels an Sri Vidya. He became a Sri Vidya Guru and started an Institute by the name of "SOHUMSTUTE" and later "LALITHOPASANA" to propogate Sri Vidya. Many disciples, not only from India, but also from Iceland and Africa were initiated by him into Sri Vidya who in their turn show deep reverence towards him.

He is a fellow of the theosophical society of India and gave several discourses at the theosophical society at Madras.

He now lives with his children in Hyderabad and Madras and leads a very active and spiritually charged life.

Krṣṇānandanātha